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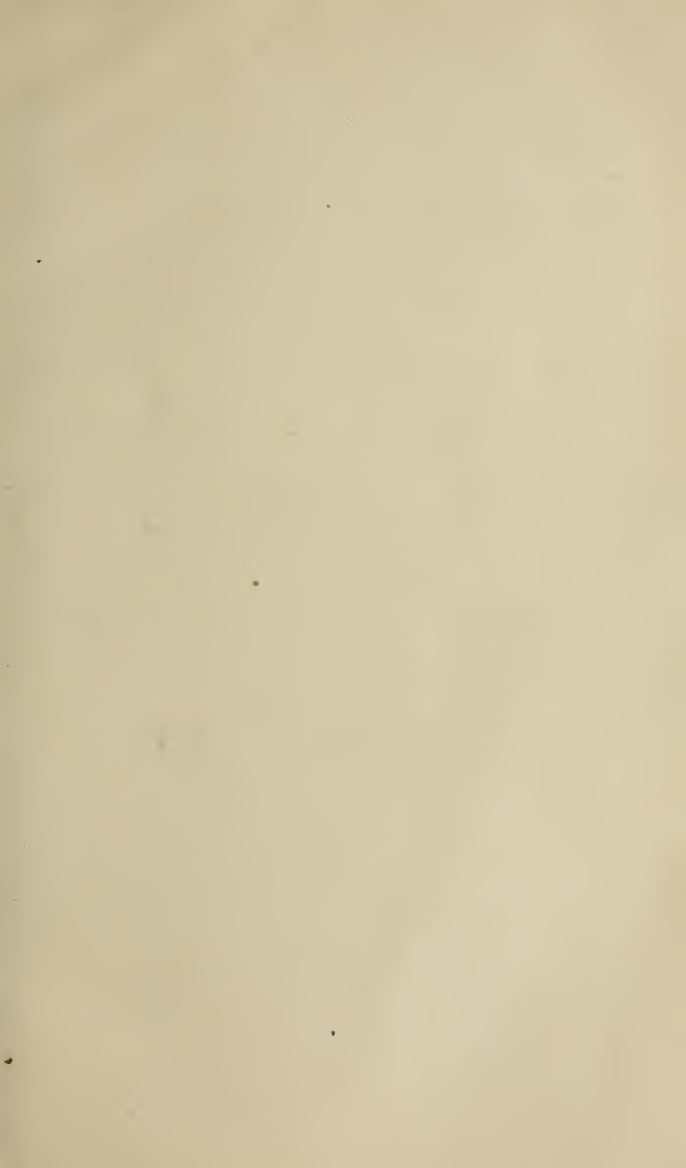
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ON

Holy Virginity :

WITH

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE

OF

St. Ambrose ;

(FROM WHOM THE TRACT IS DERIVED.)

BY ALBANY J. CHRISTIE, M.A.,

FELLOW OF ORIEL COLL., OXFORD.

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A. J. C.

SAP. 4.

O quam pulchra est casta generatio cum claritate! immortalis enim est memoria illius: quoniam apud Deum nota est et apud homines.

Life of St. Ambrose.

THE following Tract is derived from a work written by St. Ambrose, a Saint particularly distinguished for his advocacy of the exalted condition of life of which it treats, and honoured by the Anglican Church on the 4th of April, by the rest of the Western Church on the 7th of December. He was born about the year 340 after the Incarnation, at which time the Church had emerged from the flood of heathen persecution which assailed her infancy, and had lately determined at the Council of Nicæa, against the Arian heresy, the Catholic faith touching the Divinity of the Second Person in the adorable Trinity. Peace, however, was not yet to be the lot of the Church; court favour emboldened the maintainers of the Arian irreligion, and the Arian persecution of the faithful succeeded to the Pagan. The period of St. Ambrose's boyhood and youth witnessed the sufferings of the true believers, and when he was first called to act as an ecclesiastic he found the contest against the adherents of the God-denying heresy still unended, though on the death^a of the Arian Emperor Valens,

^a A.D. 378.

the Church was soon delivered by her Lord from the most implacable of her persecutors. The struggle was ceasing to be one between cruel persecution on the one side, and patient endurance on the other; strength was gradually added to the Church; things were so disposed by God that the powers of the world began to enlist on her side, and the impiety of Arius was baffled and confuted by the writings and the examples of her faithful teachers.

Our Saint was the third and last child of Ambrosius, Præfect of the Gauls^b. His birth-place is uncertain, but it was probably Treves, Arles, or Lyons. The principal events of his life are recorded by Paulinus, his deacon and secretary, and the Church is grateful that as her Lord put it into the heart of Sulpicius Severus to record the life of his master St. Martin, and of Possidius to write that of his friend St. Augustine, so too the miraculous manifestations of that living Spirit which ever dwells within the Church, as displayed through St. Ambrose, rest not on the less certain testimony of writers distant in place or time, but on the authority of one who was his constant companion and minister^c. His own Epistles too supply us with some of the most important events of his life, particularly (as we shall see hereafter) in the Divine interpositions which, during his struggles for the

^b i. e. of Gaul, England, Spain, and part of Africa (Mauritania Tingitana.)

^c The *Life of St. Ambrose* by Paulinus, and addressed by him to St. Augustine, may be found in the Appendix to the Benedictine edition of St. Ambrose, vol. ii.

faith against the Arian Empress Justina, supported and encouraged him.

The father of St. Ambrose inferred the future eloquence of his son from a swarm of bees settling on his mouth as he lay sleeping in his cradle, and passing in and out without hurting him ; nor was the childish simplicity with which he used to offer his hands to be kissed by his mother and sister, when he saw them kissing the hands of a Bishop, thought afterwards by pious minds to have been other than a presage of his future apostolic dignity. We know not how much of deep meaning lies in the simplest acts of those who in special manner are one with Him, whose every word and deed is a mine of precious ore—though we know it not, or scarcely know, and even Angels know not fully. St. Ambrose was early deprived of his earthly father, and consigned to the care of his mother, who lived (after her husband's death) in widowhood at Rome, and to his sister St. Marcellina, who was considerably older than himself, and had already received the veil from Pope Liberius. And blessed indeed was St. Marcellina in the education of her brother ; for if Holy Mary was blessed, the Virgin of Virgins, the fruit of whose womb was the Vine that filled the earth, those virgins too in their degree are blessed who have spiritually borne the fruitful olive-branches round about the table of the Lord. From his sister holy Ambrose first learned the beauty of virgin purity, and conceived that ardent love for it which pervades his works and all his teaching.

Blessed was St. Marcellina in training her brother in the service of her Lord, and praised be He who has so often made women in their retirement the instructors of Saints, whose part was afterwards openly to withstand the enemies of the truth. To Lois and Eunice we owe (under His blessing) the saintly knowledge of St. Timothy; to the prayers and tears of St. Monnica, the conversion of St. Augustine; and to the mother and sister of St. Basil, his patient endurance of a daily martyrdom in earnestly contending for the Nicene faith. Nor were the intellectual studies of Ambrose at Rome neglected, and the knowledge of Greek which he then acquired proved afterwards of the utmost use to him in the composition of many of his works.

When old enough, Ambrose went to Milan with his brother St. Satyrus, to study at the bar. It was not long before both attracted the notice of Probus, governor^d of Italy; he called them into his council, and soon after assigned to our Saint the government of the province^e of which Milan was the capital; the words with which he dismissed him to his charge proved prophetic—"Go," said he, "and act, not as Judge but as Bishop." The Bishop of Milan^f, who held the Arian impiety, died this year, and a tumult was apprehended in the choice of his successor. The Bishops therefore who assembled for the consecration

^d Prætorian Præfect.

^e viz. Æmilia and Liguria. Ambrose received this appointment A.D. 374.

^f This Arian was named Auxentius, and followed the Saint Dionysius, A.D. 354.

begged Valentinian, who was in Gaul, to nominate him, but the Emperor dreaded the responsibility of appointing an officer who was to be in very deed a representative of Christ even as His Apostles were, and declined. The people therefore were called on to elect their Bishop, and, as was expected, an uproar ensued in the Cathedral. Ambrose, as the civil magistrate, repaired to the spot and endeavoured by an oration to still it. While he was speaking, a child's voice was heard to cry out, "Ambrose—Bishop," and the whole multitude, heretics as well as Catholics, elected him by acclamation. Thus is it that the Divine counsels are oft-times brought about by means which, to the world or the philosopher, look like chance or superstition; so true it is that a spiritual kingdom, such as holy Church is, cannot be understood by human wisdom; the circumstances of her existence are, no less than the Cross which she preaches, foolishness—to them that perish; but by them whose eyes are opened to see the heavenly powers enlisted on her side, the mysterious under-workings of God's Providence are contemplated with thankful adoration.

Such as Ambrose became, such was he already, though yet unwashed in the laver of regeneration; the character which was capable of development into the Christian Saint, already existed in its natural form, in the yet unbaptized catechumen. Since therefore the greatest saints are ever the most humble, it is no wonder that he had recourse to every expedient to shun

the weight of the responsibility thrust upon him. He hastily quitted the assembly, and, mounting his tribunal, exhibited severity in his civil judgments and used the strangest means to make the people think him unworthy of the Episcopate. All would not do; the only effect produced was a general cry, *Thy sin be upon us*, from all the people; he fled from the city, and was not brought back till the Emperor made it criminal for any person to conceal him. Then at length he was obliged to submit, and after being baptized and fulfilling the ecclesiastical offices^g, he was on the eighth day, being now above thirty years of age, ordained. He wished^h indeed the sacramental rite deferred, in obedience to the Apostle's ruleⁱ that a Bishop shall not be a novice, but where Divine grace^k had so signally ordered his elevation, the Church was but following the guidance of that Holy Spirit who had inspired St. Paul, in making allowance^l for such extraordinary cases, and his objections were overruled.

The promotion of St. Ambrose was approved by the Bishops of the whole Church^m, and there is still extant the letter which St. Basil addressed to himⁿ on the occasion, in which he exhorts St. Ambrose, "now translated to the chair of the Apostles, to fight the good fight and heal the sicknesses of the people, wherever infected with the Arian madness." This letter was accompanied by the reliques of St. Dionysius, the last Catholic Bishop of Milan, who had been

^g Paulin. Vit. § 9.

^h Epist. 63. § 65.

ⁱ 1 Tim. iii. 6.

^k Theodor. Hist. Eccl. 4. 6.

^l Canon. Apostol. lxxx.

^m Ep. 63. § 65.

ⁿ Ep. 55. al. 197. vol. iii. p. 287. ed. Bened.

dethroned by the Arians and died an exile in Capadocia the same year that our Saint was sent by Probus to his government with the prophetic words above recorded; as though the Arian, Auxentius, who followed St. Dionysius, were a mere cypher in the succession of the see of Milan, and St. Ambrose was in the Divine counsels already regarded as the rightful Bishop.

St. Ambrose now distributed his money to the poor and gave his lands to the Church, making his sister tenant for life^o; and he made over to his brother, St. Satyrus, who constantly lived with him at Milan, the sole management of his worldly affairs^p. Feeling himself unequal to his office in point of knowledge^q, he invited from Rome a priest named St. Simplician^r, who lived to succeed him. So vigorously did he resist the Arian irreligion that in a few years^s it only existed among some of the Gothic soldiers and in the royal family^t.

He used to preach every Sunday^u; he slept little, and such was his abstinence, that he fasted daily, and dined only on the Sabbath^x, (i. e. Saturday,) the Lord's Day, and the festivals of the most noted Martyrs^y. He

^o Paulin. § 38. ^p De Excessu Satyri. § 20. ^q De Officiis. 1. § 4.

^r Ep. 65; S. August. Confess. vi. 3. viii. 2. ^s By A. D. 385.

^t Ep. 20. § 12. ^u S. Aug. Confess. vi. 3, 13. ^x Paulin. § 38.

^y "If any clerk be found fasting on the Lord's Day or any Sabbath, except the one only, let him be deposed; if any layman, let him be excommunicated." Canon. Apostol. 65 (al. 56). The *one* Sabbath excepted is the Holy Sabbath or Easter-Eve. This Canon was directed against the heretics who considered the creation the work of an evil god, and so commemorated its completion by fasting. It is therefore obviously unreasonable to charge the Western Church with contempt of the Apostolic Canons in making Saturday a day of abstinence, for the occasion of the Canon never existed to such a degree in the West as in the East, and has practically ceased altogether. The rule at Milan, in this respect, was an exception to the general custom in the West; St. Ambrose, however,

offered the Holy Sacrifice every day^z. In his sermons he dwelt largely on the blessedness of Holy Virginity, and published three books^a on the subject, (begun on the festival of St. Agnes) from one of which the following Tract is derived. And as he thus exhibited his care for those who aspired to the *hundred-fold*, he soon displayed the like solicitude for them whose reward is *sixty-fold*, by issuing a work on Widows, whom he strongly dissuaded from second marriage^b. The Church was his peculiar care, but his active spirit passed beyond her pale, and on one occasion we find the holy Bishop representing to the Emperor certain abuses in the Courts of Law, and on the other hand the pious Emperor using his authority to remedy the evil^c. No less anxiously did he guard the administration of justice by Ecclesiastics, in cases referred to them; and sharply he rebuked the Bishop Syagrius for treating in unbecoming manner a calumniated maiden^d.

Gratian, who succeeded^e his father Valentinian I., supported St. Ambrose against Arianism, and before marching to aid his uncle Valens, against the Goths, begged St. Ambrose to write a work on the Divinity

when at Rome, or in any other place where it was usual to fast on the Sabbath, conformed to the custom of the place (St. Aug. Ep. 36.) al. 86. ad Casul.

^z Ep. 20. § 15.

^a Opp. S. Ambr. tom. ii. p. 145. 213. ed. Bened. The Benedictine Editors separate these three books, as it would seem, wrongly. They were written A.D. 377.

^b Tom. ii. p. 185. A.D. 377.

^c See Theodor. Hist. Eccl. 4. 6. The Emperor was Valentinian I., who died A.D. 375.

^d A.D. 380. Vid. Ep. 5.

^e Nov. 17, A.D. 375.

of the Second Person in the Blessed Trinity, which he did in his two books *On the Faith*^f. Before Gratian could reach Valens the latter perished at the battle of Hadrianople (A.D. 378), and St. Ambrose devoted the treasure and vessels of the Church to the ransom of captives, who were exposed for sale in numbers in consequence of these wars^g.

St. Satyrus, St. Ambrose's brother, died in this year or the following, at Milan. St. Ambrose pronounced over him two funeral orations which are still extant^h; and Dongalus, a writer in the ninth century, gives his epitaph, and ascribes it to St. Ambroseⁱ. Gratian passed through Milan after declaring Theodosius, Augustus, at Sirmium (Jan. 19, A.D. 379), and at his request our Saint added three more books *On the Faith*, to his former two, and also gave promise of a work *On the Holy Ghost*, which he completed in three books^k. In A.D. 380, St. Ambrose went even out of his jurisdiction to help the Church at Sirmium, which was threatened with the appointment of an Arian Bishop through the influence of Justina, the widow of Valentinian I., and the mother of Gratian and Valentinian the younger : his undertaking was blessed

^f A.D. 377-8. tom. ii. p. 443. About this same time he wrote Ep. 2. to Constantius, Bp. of Imola, putting him on his guard against the Arians who had been driven into his diocese by the Gothic invasion.

^g De Offic. ii. 15, 28.

^h 1. De Excessu Satyri; 2. De Fide Resurrectionis, vol. ii. p. 1113.

ⁱ Biblioth. Maxima Patrum, vol. xiv. p. 223.

^k A.D. 381. (ineunt.) vol. ii. p. 599. In this last work he made great use of St. Basil's book on the same subject, and of Didymus of Alexandria (S. Hier. Didym. Præf. tom. iv. p. 493). Our Saint at this time used his influence with Gratian to procure two laws favourable to the Church (Cod. Theodos. xvi. tit. 5. 5. xv. tit. 7. 4.)

by the ordination of Aneminius, but Justina from that day became his bitterest enemy^l.

In A.D. 381, a Council was held at Aquileia, on an application made to Gratian three years before by two Arian Bishops, who wished to have their cause tried by an Œcumenical Council. The Council of Nicæa (A.D. 325), had already defined the Faith, and St. Ambrose represented the unreasonableness of disturbing the whole Church for two obscure Bishops, who resisted its irreversible decrees^m. The heretics therefore appeared before a Council of thirty-two or thirty-three Bishops, and their condemnation of the *Epistle of Arius* to St. Alexander was made the test of their orthodoxyⁿ; the test convicted them, and they were deposed^o. The Western Bishops now desired a General Council at Rome, to arrange the affairs of the Church^p. This was not effected, as the Eastern Bishops excused themselves^q; however, we find St. Ambrose at a Council at Rome, A.D. 382^r, and while there he cured a woman of the palsy^s, and was visited also in a sickness by St. Ascholius, the famous Bishop of Thessalonica^t.

^l Paulin. § 12. This same year, or the next, he rejected the petition of the Priscillianist heretics, who had been condemned at Saragoza (Oct. 4, A.D. 380). The great Theodosius (Nov. 26) restored to the Catholics their Churches at Constantinople, and the next year the second Œcumenical council was held there.

^m Ep. 12. § 3. 10. § 2; Script. Imperat. in Gestis Concil. Aquil. § 4.

ⁿ See the *Epistle*, ap. S. Epiph. adv. Hær. 69. § 7; and St. Athanas. de Synod. II. § 16. Oxford Translation 1842, p. 96.

^o Mansi Concilia. vol. iii. p. 599.

^p Ep. 12, 13, 14.

^q Theodoret. Hist. Eccl. v. 8. 9. ^r Soz. H. E. vii. 11. ^s Paulin. § 10.

^t Ep. 15. § 10. Cases of St. Ambrose's practice of interceding for criminals occur this year (Paulin. § 37. Sozom. Hist. Eccl. 7. 24. See Fleury's Eccl. Hist. Bk. 18. 28, and Bk. 20. 15; and Ep. 57. § 11. A.D. 392, and Ep. 62. A.D. 394.

To the next year, A.D. 383, is referred his treatise *On the Mystery of the Incarnation*^u, suggested by two Arian chamberlains of Gratian. He also presented the counter-remonstrance of the Christian senators to Gratian, when the Pagans petitioned the latter against the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Senate-house^x.

On the death of Gratian at the hands of the usurper Maximus, (Aug. 25, A.D. 383,) Justina committed the affairs of her son, Valentinian II., (now twelve years old,) to St. Ambrose, who went to Maximus, obtained peace^y, and prevented his passing into Italy^z. He remained through the winter with Maximus, but refused to communicate with him^a. The next year, A.D. 384, St. Ambrose returned to Milan, where Valentinian held his court, and he frustrated the attempts of the Pagan Symmachus, to have the Altar of Victory restored^b. This year Augustine came to Milan^c, where St. Monnica, his mother, found that St. Ambrose had abolished the much-abused feasts at the Martyrs' tombs^d.

Justina, A.D. 385, employed the peace which St. Ambrose had obtained for her, in persecuting him. She had procured the appointment of an Arian Bishop at Milan, named Auxentius, and she now (March) demanded of St. Ambrose a church called the Portian, for her irreligious worship. When this

^u De Incarnationis Sacramento, vol. ii. p. 703.

^x Ep. 17. § 10.

^y Ruffin. Hist. Eccl. xi. 15.

^z Ep. 20 and 24.

^a Tillemont, Hist. Eccl. tom. x. note 20 on St. Ambrose.

^b Symmach. Ep. x. 54; S. Ambr. Ep. 17 and 18.

^c Confess. v. 13.

^d Confess. vi. 2.

was refused^e, various means were resorted to for removing the holy Bishop^f. They proved unsuccessful: and on April 4, the Friday before Palm Sunday, a new demand was made for the larger church of the Holy Apostles; and on Saturday the Portian was again required. The Saint was inflexible. On Palm Sunday, as he was instructing the candidates^g for Baptism, he was told that the Portian was seized in the Emperor's name^h. He proceeded however to offer massⁱ, and while making the oblation was told that an Arian priest was in the hands of the populace; on which he sent some of his clergy to rescue him. The wealthy tradesmen were fined, and many thrown into prison, even in Holy Week^k. St. Ambrose himself went from the Church home, to give an opportunity to the civil power of arresting him. The attempt on the Portian was given up; the other Basilica was seized; but St. Ambrose threatened the soldiers with excommunication, and the imperial hangings^l, indicative of confiscation, were removed. Justina closed the year in procuring a law in favour of the Arians^m, but Benevolus, the secretary of state, a Catholic, resigned his office rather than draw it upⁿ. It was promulgated Jan. 21, 386. Another attempt was made to subdue the holy Bishop. He was called on to dispute with Auxentius, (who had been elected

^e Ep. 20. § 1.

^g *Competentes*, the approved candidates.

ⁱ *Sic*, § 4. p. 853.

^l *Cortinæ*.

ⁿ Ruffin. Hist. Eccl. xi. 16. Soz. Hist. Eccl. vii. 13. Præfat. S. Gaudent.

^f Paulin. § 12.

^h Ep. 20. 2—4.

^k Cod. Theod. 9. tit. 38. l. 8.

^m Cod. Theod. 16. tit. 1. 4.

by his party to succeed his name-sake, as Arian Bishop of Milan), in the Emperor's consistory, or to quit the city. To do the former would be to make laymen judges of holy things ; to do the latter voluntarily would have been to betray his trust ; and he declined both^o. He was shut up in the quadrangle of the sacred enclosure, and while the soldiers allowed whosoever would to enter, none were allowed to come out. It was now that St. Ambrose introduced the responsorial mode of chaunting, which continues to this day at Milan, and, modified by Pope St. Gregory, generally in the Western Church^p. He refers to it in a sermon delivered on Palm Sunday against Auxentius^q in the Portian Basilica. Even Maximus remonstrated with Valentinian^r ; but, as might be expected, when things seemed at the worst, the Divine Presence in the Church was manifested in the defence of truth against Arian persecution. The reliques of St. Gervasius and St. Protasius were revealed in a dream^s to St. Ambrose on June 18th^t, and as they were on the way to be deposited beneath the altar of the church (now called) of St. Ambrose the Greater, Severus, a blind man, well known in Milan, was brought to them, touched them, and received his sight^u. This terminated the persecution. The comment of St. Ambrose

^o Ep. 21. ^p Paul. Vit. § 13. ^q Sermo de Basilicis tradendis.

^r Thdt. Hist. 5. 14. Mansi's Concilia, iii. p. 673.

^s S. Augustin. Confess. 9. 7. De Civit. 22. 8. ^t Ep. 22. 12.

^u See St. Augustine as just quoted, and Serm. de Divers. 286 [39] 5. St. Ambros. Ep. 22. Paulin. § 14, 15. Church of the Fathers, ch. 3, and Introductory Essay to Transl. of Fleury's Eccl. Hist. Oxf. 1842, p. clxxxv.

on St. Luke was completed this year, and he wrote^x to the Bishops of Æmilia on fixing the time of Easter.

In A.D. 387, St. Ambrose baptized St. Augustine; but the sermon ascribed to him on the occasion is spurious. St. Augustine speaks of a monastery near Milan under the special care of St. Ambrose^y. After Easter, St. Ambrose went again on an embassy to Maximus to divert him from Italy^z, but Justina was doomed to reap the bitter fruits of her irreligion; the embassy failed. Maximus marched to surprise Valentinian at Milan, but he escaped to Theodosius^a with his mother^b. In the following year, Theodosius defeated Maximus, and at Milan received an epistle^c from St. Ambrose, who was at Aquileia, protesting against his command to the Bishop of Callinicus in the East, to rebuild a synagogue, which had been burnt by the Christians; and on his return to Milan, St. Ambrose refused to offer the sacrifice till Theodosius had pledged himself to stop the proceeding^d. This year St. Ambrose's influence was a third time exerted against the Pagans, and he prevented Theodosius from paying any attention to the deputation sent by them to obtain the restoration of the Altar of Victory^e. In A.D. 390, St. Ambrose condemned in a Council at Milan the Ithacians for persecuting to the death the Priscillianist heretics^f, as well as Jovinian,

^x Epist. 23.

^y Confess. viii. 6.

^z De Ob. Valent. § 28. Ep. 24. Paulin. § 19.

^a Zosimus, iv. 42.

^b Ruff. xi. 16. To this year are referred Epist. 25, 26, on the Punishment of Death.

^c Epist. 40.

^d Epist. 41. § 1.

^e Epist. 57.

^f Chron. Prosper. A.D. 389.

who irreligiously asserted that the blessed Mother of God ceased to be a virgin after the Nativity^g. The same year is celebrated for the *penance of Theodosius*. In a tumult at Thessalonica, the commander of his forces, Botheric, was killed. At first the indignation of Theodosius (now at Milan) was calmed by St. Ambrose and the other Bishops, but afterwards, at the instigation of his ministers, during some absence from Milan, he ordered a general massacre, and seven thousand persons perished in three hours^h. St. Ambrose wrote to the Emperorⁱ and excommunicated him^k. For eight months the suspension lasted; till at last, at Christmas, the pious Emperor submitted to the Divine authority in the holy Bishop, and did public penance, stripped of his kingly robes^l, prostrate on the pavement^m which he watered with his tears, and uttering the words of the 119th Psalm, *My soul cleaveth unto the dust, quicken Thou me according to Thy word*. After making his oblation, he, according to the Eastern custom, was remaining within the sanctuary, when St. Ambrose sent his Archdeacon to bid him retire to the rest of the laityⁿ. This gave occasion to Theodosius to say on a subsequent occasion, when Nectarius at Constantinople asked him *why* he left the sanctuary: "No BISHOP do I know save AMBROSE." Theo-

^g Ep. 42. § 13; Mansi Concilia, iii. p. 667. B. St. Ambrose vindicates the perpetual virginity of St. Mary against Bonosus in his *De Institutione Virginis*, a work made from a sermon delivered (A.D. 391—400) on the Profession of Ambrosia.

^h Soz. vii. 25; Ruff. xi. 18; Thdt. v. 17; St. August. *De Civit. Dei*, 26; Paulin. § 24.

ⁱ Epist. 51.

^k Paulin. § 24.

^l De Obit. Theod. § 34.

^m Soz. vii. 25.

ⁿ Thdt. 5. 18.

dosius, besides submitting to the penance, in satisfaction for his crime, confirmed the law of Gratian, which deferred the execution of a judicial sentence for thirty days^o. On the 15th of May, A.D. 392, the young Valentinian was killed at Vienne by his Gothic general Arbogastes^p: his remains were brought to Milan, and St. Ambrose pronounced his funeral oration^q; in which he promised to offer the sacrifice for the two brothers as long as he lived^r. Arbogastes made Eugenius Emperor, and when the latter came to Milan, our holy Bishop retired to Bologna, and addressed to him an expostulation^s. The Milanese clergy also refused Eugenius's offerings. At Bologna, A.D. 393, St. Ambrose was present at the translation of the reliques of St. Vitalis and St. Agricola^t: then at Florence he dedicated a church with the reliques of the former^u. This church was built by a devout widow, Juliana, with reference to whose virgin daughter he preached at the dedication his *Exhortation to Virginitv*^x. Here he raised a child to life^y, and wrote a book for his instruction^z. When Eugenius left Milan, St. Ambrose returned, and awaited the victory of Theodosius, whose letter of thanks thereupon he offered on the altar^a. On Jan. 17, A.D. 395,

^o Cod. Theodos. ix. tit. 40. 13. Ruffin. Hist. Eccl. xi. 18. At this time, probably, his wide-spread fame brought two noble Persians into Italy, whose only object was to see him and the Præfect Probus. Paulin. § 25; Fleury, Eccl. Hist. Book 19. 22. The letter of St. Ambrose (Epist. 56) on the subject of the Antiochene schism and the Council of Capua (A.D. 391) is referred to A.D. 392.

^p S. Epiph. *de Ponderibus*, § 28 [20.]

^q De Obitu Valentiniani, vol. ii. p. 1173.

^r § 56.

^s Ep. 57.

^t Paulin. § 29.

^u Exhort. Virginitatis, § 1.

^x Vol. ii. p. 277.

^y Paulin. § 28.

^z This work is not extant.

^a A.D. 394.

Theodosius died; and on the fortieth day^b St. Ambrose made his funeral oration^c. He also sent, this year, the reliques of St. Nazarius and Celsus to St. Paulinus of Nola^d. In A.D. 396, Stilicho, the guardian of the young princes, did penance for a breach of sanctuary^e; and Fritigil, queen of the Marcomanni, was converted through St. Ambrose, whose *Catechism of the Faith*, sent to her on this occasion, is unhappily lost^f. Our holy Saint, mighty in words and deeds, fell asleep in Christ on April 4th, 397, on which day he is commemorated by the Anglican Church. He was entreated to pray for a continuance of life^g, but was wholly resigned, and approved of St. Simplicianus (his former instructor) as his successor. A few days before his departure, Paulinus, who was writing from his dictation a comment on the 44th Psalm, saw a globe of fire encircle his head, and enter gently at his mouth. From that time he ceased to dictate, and the comment remains imperfect. Wrapt in prayer from before vespers on Good Friday till after midnight, his arms stretched in the form of a Cross, he received the Viaticum from St. Honoratus, and departed to his peace^h. The Basilica Ambrosiana received his reliques, and the holy Bishop did not desert the Church even when his earthly sojourn was overⁱ.

^b Constit. Apost. 8. 42.

^c De Obitu Theodosii, tom. ii. p. 1197.

^d Natal. 9. v. 436. p. 638. Fol. Veron. 1736.

^e Paulin. § 34.

^f A valuable epistle, on occasion of the disputes at Vercellæ about the appointment of a Bishop, was written this year (Ep. 63) by St. Ambrose, who ordained for that see St. Honoratus.

^g Paulin. § 44.

^h Paulin. § 46, 47. Pagi. an. 397. § 6.

ⁱ Paulin. § 48—52.

[Most of St. Ambrose's writings have been mentioned already chronologically. In his *Hexaëmeron* (tom. i. p. 1) A.D. 387-8, he mainly followed Origen, St. Hippolytus, and St. Basil. The *Appendix* (A.D. 388) to it is addressed to Horontianus. His *De Officiis* (the idea of which he had from Cicero) on the duties of Ecclesiastics, was written A.D. 386 (tom. ii. p. 1.) His *De Mysteriis* (tom. ii. p. 325), on the Sacraments (c. 1) of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, may have been composed on St. Austin's baptism, A.D. 387. (The six books on the Sacraments (ibid. p. 349) are not his.) The date of his two books, *On Penitence*, against the Novatians, (ibid. p. 389,) is uncertain. The third Homily, *De Diversis*, A.D. 395. His *Seven Books on the Patriarchs*, (Tillemont. Hist. Eccl. x. p. 291,) A.D. 387, and various works on the Psalms and Histories of the Old Testament, from A.D. 376—396. There are several Hymns composed by him extant (tom. ii. p. 1219) which are still used in the offices of the Breviary. Most of the sermons ascribed to him are by St. Maximus of Turin. Ninety-one Epistles are extant. The *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles* (called commonly *Ambrosiaster*) was written by Hilary the Deacon (tom. ii. Append. p. 25). The *Te Deum*, ascribed to St. Ambrose, dates, it is supposed, from the sixth century.

As to the editions of St. Ambrose, the first is by Maffellus Venia, who died A.D. 1486. The Milanese edition followed A.D. 1490; then those of Basle, A.D. 1492—1567; the Parisian, A.D. 1529—1665; and the Roman, A.D. 1580—1587. The Benedictine is the latest, and though the best, is complained of (See Fabricius, Bibl. Latin. Ven. 1728, tom. ii. p. 315.) It is in two volumes, fol. Par. 1686—1690. The Benedictines (faultily) place the *De Sacramentis* among St. Ambrose's works. More recently the *History of the Destruction of Jerusalem*, usually given to Egesippus or Ex-Josippus, in five books, has been claimed for St. Ambrose. (Vid. Gallandi. *Bibliotheca Patrum*. tom. vii. Proleg. xxix. &c.) Gallandi has added three *Hymns*, not in the Benedictine edition. Ibid. p. 772. (è cod. Vatic. lxxxii.) Still more lately Angelo Mai (now Cardinal) has discovered St. Ambrose's *Explanatio Symboli ad initiandos* and *Epistola de Fide ad B. Hieronymum*. See tom. vii. p. 158-9 (A.D. 1833) of his *Scriptorum Veterum Nova Collectio*; at the beginning of which volume is *Patrum Doctrina de Verbi Incarnatione*, in Greek, with several passages from St. Ambrose translated from the Latin.]

Preface.

IT may at first sight seem strange that any person should think of publishing a tract such as the present, the subject of which is more likely in these days to be made matter of ridicule than of serious thought and earnest practice. And this consideration is indeed a material one and not to be treated lightly, if we call to mind, that besides precepts of love, Scripture contains others of a character which to our age are less attractive, such as, *Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine.* Perhaps even those who are most averse to that sacred reserve, with which the truths of our holy faith should be treasured up, so as not to expose them wantonly to the scoffer and profane, may for once espouse the cause they disavow, and protest against an exhibition of the evangelic counsels such as the present. However, the objections of these latter will in reality be grounded on no principle so worthy of consideration as that of reverence; they have so lost themselves in the one doctrine of man's natural corruption, that their teaching practically treats solely of the conversion of the sinner (a phrase how sadly abused!) and it neglects the perfecting of the saints. And so it ever is; the exclusive contemplation of one doctrine at once shuts out the vision of the rest, which are no

less essential, and also, destroying the due proportion of the several parts of the faith, distorts and perverts that one doctrine which is selected as the favourite. Now, Holy Virginity is not a duty incumbent upon all men, and yet St. Paul would have all men as he was because there is special honour to this grace, so great, that however well that man does who seeks the bonds of holy wedlock, which is indeed honourable in all, yet he who in this as in other points strives to follow the steps of his Virgin Master and for the kingdom of Heaven's sake makes himself an eunuch, as certainly doeth better. Holy Virginity then is not a duty but an evangelic counsel of perfection; a special prerogative of those who would be perfect, like voluntary poverty, or perfect retirement from the society of our fellow-men; a grace, like these, which men in general cannot attain, to which peradventure men in general ought not to aspire; a grace, moreover, which makes its possessors a blessing to those around them, who are not called to the practice of the same perfection^a. What wonder then if those who speak so little of duty and the Christian law, that Law of Faith which all must obey, and by obedience to which only, they as members of Christ's body, once justified in holy Baptism, can be finally justified in that day; what wonder if they altogether disregard the higher graces, and because their

^a And in this respect these high spiritual graces are analogous to God's natural gifts; e. g. all men cannot be physicians, yet it is true that those who are, are a blessing to the world.

principles do not reach them, speak of them as visionary and mock at them.

But it is of her children that Wisdom is justified, and of these whose ears are open in docility to the voice of holy Church and dread the rude exposure of sacred things, there may be some, who will feel pain at the publication of this Tract. Their scruples are most worthy of consideration, and one would fain remove them; and thus much at least (whether my reasons satisfy them or no) I trust they will believe, that I too have felt the difficulty and have not thoughtlessly or triflingly published the present tract.

It is obvious to notice that there are not more to ridicule this exalted grace in these days than there were in the time of St. Ambrose. Now, though there is but little analogy between *his* publishing this treatise and its publication at a time when printing has made common what then required the labour of transcribers to supply to a few, yet the pulpit supplies a much closer analogy. Information which is now spread abroad by the press, was then circulated in a great degree by the numerous professors of rhetoric, who abounded in every town: the Church, which has ever adapted itself to the lawful expedients which in various ages have predominated, had also her teachers, analagous to the pagan orators; true, the latter sat in the "seat of lies," and the Bishops in the Chair of Truth, still the means (in themselves good or indifferent) were the popular means of the day, and through them the struggles between the pro-

fessors of Christianity and the heathen, between the professors of truth and of error in Christianity, that is, between the Catholic and the heretic, were carried on. Nor were the faithful alone admitted to these rhetorical exercises (or as we shall call them *sermons*), St. Augustine was still a Manichee when he hung upon the words of St. Ambrose, and at Antioch the Pagans, deserted by their own philosophers, forsook the theatre and the race-course, when threatened with destruction by the offended Theodosius, to hear in the Church the consolations of St. Chrysostom.

Now we find that in his public instructions there was no topic upon which St. Ambrose dwelt more frequently than the loveliness of virgin purity. Neither did he desist, when it became plain that many were offended at these instructions; there were mothers who forbade their daughters to hear his exhortations, and fathers who opposed him, but he persevered, and the seed which he sowed at Milan bore fruit at Bologna and the surrounding cities, and has continued to bear fruit in after ages and in distant lands, in an abundant harvest of virgin souls. It may not be wrong now to attempt to extend his influence; it is a solemn thought that the pains of departed heretics and writers of impurity may be constantly increased as the venom of their sentiments corrupts one victim after another; may it not likewise be true that the bliss of saints receives continual accession by the communication of the blessed effects of their

exhortations to truth and purity? If so, were it not a prize worth trying for, to increase the bliss of Ambrose? Yes! and we may in return win his prayers for us, and perhaps through them be made ourselves worthy of this high grace, which seems as yet so far beyond our reach.

As there were some who profited by St. Ambrose's instructions then, some will be found even now by whom his words will be esteemed. We, in this age, may be unworthy to read or to translate treatises of the holy Fathers on the evangelic counsels, still if rightly undertaken, the work may be blessed both to reader and translator; or, at least, we may be working for another purer and more faithful age, which will receive with gladness the sentences of the Christian saints.

That the grace of Holy Virginity is a very great gift, no Christian who receives the testimony of Holy Scripture can doubt. Some are so highly favoured as to possess this gift from their mother's womb^b, but those who are not so blest need not despair of being made worthy of it^c; for if there be an earnest mind, God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. In the present state of the Anglican Church it may be harder to acquire than elsewhere, still the means are the same as they ever

^b St. Matt. xix. 12.

^c Ibid. 1 Cor. vi.

were, and they are such as these: abstinence from the company of the other sex; that *covenant with the eyes* spoken of by the patriarch Job^d; obedience to the Church's rules of fasting, together with a general low diet; an *earnest coveting*^e of that most excellent gift of chastity, making it a subject of special prayer; and (would that it could be added with the hope of being practised) frequent confession^f. One more consideration may be added, namely, the habitual contemplation of the chastity of our Blessed Lord Himself, and of His Holy Mother. If we find few external helps in the present external provisions of our Church, if our churches are closed against us, and the blessed Eucharist, where we are made one with the Virgin Body of our Lord, is rarely celebrated, we must endeavour to fulfil the Church's requirements in private; and so doing, we shall gain time for prayer, and be able, the more we renounce the world, to prevail with God to make up to us the disadvantages under which we lie.

Since then Holy Virginity is, as all must admit, a great grace wherever it is possessed, so it is equally clear that to certain persons it is in some sense a duty. It would plainly be a duty in those who are described by our Blessed Lord as "eunuchs which were so born from their mother's womb;" and in

^d Job xxxi. 1.

^e 1 Cor. xii. 31.

^f For want of this there is great reason to fear that the solitude in which the young among the clergy find themselves, leads to thoughts, if not to acts, too apt to wean them from all the good resolutions they may have made, of renouncing marriage.

another sense it is ecclesiastically and in the abstract, the duty of the clergy^g, not indeed by Divine obligation^h, but by the unvarying practice and repeated decrees of councils from the earliest times down to the division in the Western Church. It is indeed difficult to say how far in the Anglican communion modern habits may render the infraction of the canons excusable, or even, in particular cases, proper. The enforcement of a rule, specially suited to a pure and self-denying Church, may be inexpedient at a time when comfort is the idol which we worship. It is plain too that women are entitled to a share in the offices of the Church, in visiting the poor, ministering to the sick, and instructing the young; offices from which they might be in great measure debarred now that celibacy in the clergy is not recognised as the rule, until, which is most to be desired, sisterhoods shall again be formed by pious virgins, and endowed by the wealthy of the land. However, a Church where there is so much to justify the infraction of such important rules appertaining to the clergy, must needs be a Church in sackcloth, or if not, ought to be. And it is but too plain that with the loss of celibacy in the clergy, we have also lost the daily Sacrifice, which elsewhere is retained, and which is so intimately connected with the former; for, as says

^g The subject of *the Continence of the Clergy*, has been followed in its history, in a note to the new translation of Fleury's Ecclesiastical History, bk. xix. ch. 22. note h. p. 183, 4.

^h To maintain this would be in opposition to the Council of Trent, no less than to the 32nd Article of the Synod of London, A.D. 1562.

that holy Bishop, St. Siriciusⁱ, “ among the ancients it was customary for priests to marry, because the ministers of the Altar were obliged to have a succession of the same family, though even they lived separate from their wives during the time of their ministration. But since Christ came to perfect the law, priests and deacons are bound by an inviolable decree to observe, from the day of their ordination, sobriety and continence, that they may be well-pleasing to God, in the sacrifices which they *daily* offer up to Him^k.” Peradventure *when* the daily Sacrifice is restored to us, the *discretion*^l of our clergy will lead them to judge that a life of self-denying continence serves better to godliness than that course of life to which their inclination may dispose them.

If then, in any sense and to any persons, Holy Virginitv is a duty; if to all who can receive the saying of our Blessed Lord, it is a privilege of exceeding preciousness, whereby the sons and daughters of the Church may resemble in a special manner the Church's Virgin Spouse; as well as imitate those who have most closely trodden in His footsteps, His Holy Mother and the Apostle whom He loved, the absence of writings and exhortations on this subject must indicate a deplorably low standard of Christian practice. How then is this lack to be supplied? We are, all of us, educated in so secular a manner, our

ⁱ A.D. 385.

^k Epist. Rom. Pontif. a Constant. Par. 1721. p. 624, &c.

^l Article 32.

intercourse with society is so promiscuous, that *original* treatises can hardly, at any rate *yet*, be expected. We may sincerely feel and confess the dignity of this grace, and yet we shall be in great danger of unreality, if we were to write upon it. May not this (as well as other considerations which might be mentioned) justify the attempt which is here made to convey to the English reader the teaching of one who at once by his example and his precept set forth the praise of virgin purity? He was approved, while he yet lived, by miracles; and a patient hearing, at the least, may be demanded for one whom the Church has canonized, and whom we, of the Anglican communion, yearly commemorate on the anniversary of his birth-day into Heaven.

Oriel College,
Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin,
1843.

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On Holy Virginity.

CHAP. I.

The Objectors really worldly and tempters.

[THE Church has ever been at issue with the world, and the struggle between Faith and Sight has never ceased. How often does the latter gain the victory, and we make shipwreck of our faith! All the commands, all the counsels of Faith have reference to an unseen world, and he alone can follow them whose eyes are purged, and open to the invisible. Among these counsels is *Virginity*, a grace we do not honour, because we are so earth-bound; so high a grace of Faith that it is no wonder Sight weans us from pursuing it. Well then may a treatise on Virginity begin with the spiritual interpretation of the Judgment of Solomon, where Faith and Temptation are the rival claimants.]

IN what age of the Church has not this judgment been celebrated? Two women came to the king and stood before him^a. One had overlaid her child in the night, and it had died, and she claimed the other's son as hers. How was the king to judge the secrets

^a 1 Kings iii.

of their hearts, for evidence on either side there was none? He commanded a sword to be brought, the living child to be divided, and half given to one and half to the other. She who was not the mother, assented and pressed the execution of the sentence; the other, whose bowels yearned upon her son, and whose love for him was greater than her desire to possess him, said, *O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it*; and so Solomon (though unable to read the heart by divine intelligence) through his wisdom pronounced her to be the mother, and the other one, as void of natural affection as she was of piety.

Thus, though for a time obscured, the truth finally was discovered. The real mother was long kept in suspense, but at last the uncertainty was dispelled; and this is written, in a figure, for our learning, that we may know that there is nothing hid which shall not be brought to light, or secret which shall not be revealed.

By the two women are signified Faith and Temptation. When the latter has forfeited its own fruit by sinful living and sloth, she endeavours to rob Faith of her offspring. While the cause is pending, Faith is perplexed. At length the sword of Christ brings to light the hidden affections; that sword of which it is written, *I am come to send a sword upon the earth*^b, and again, *A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also*^c; and it is described thus: *The Word of God is quick and*

^b St. Matt. x. 34.

^c St. Luke ii. 35.

powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow^d. A good sword is the word of God, there is none like it; it searches the heart and reins, and discerns truth from falsehood, piercing the soul not to its destruction but to its salvation.

Such is the history recorded in the Book of Kings, such its moral lesson and spiritual application. Let us now attend to the history of Jephthah: it will teach us the obligation of vows.

CHAP. II.

Of vows in general; they are scriptural and binding when made for holy purposes.

JEPHTHAH^e was one of the judges of Israel. Fearful of the doubtful event of a war, he vowed that in case of victory he would offer for a burnt-offering to the God of battles whatever first came forth of the doors of his house to meet him. He was conqueror and smote the enemy, and on his return his daughter, who knew not of his vow, in duteous haste came forth to meet him with timbrels and with dances. And when he saw her he rent his clothes and said, Alas! my daughter, thou hast brought me very low, for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord. And she said to him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath pro-

^d Heb. iv. 12.

^e Judg. xi.

ceeded out of thy mouth. She only begged for a respite of two months, that she might bewail her virginity upon the mountains. At the end of the two months, she returned to her father, who fulfilled his vow ; though Holy Scripture indeed passes on in silence, in abhorrence of the crime.

God forbid that we should praise the act of Jephthah ; at the same time his fear of breaking his vow was right : as it was said to Abraham, *Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me*^f. A promise therefore must not be rashly broken ; yet the same passage in the Patriarch's life proves God's hatred of Jephthah's crime, in that a ram was substituted for Isaac, and offered up for the burnt-offering.

Jephthah, therefore, must have known that God delighteth not in human blood ; for in the divine announcement made to Abraham, he might have learnt that while God's service must take precedence of parental affections, yet parents should consecrate their offspring to God, not slay them. Strange, that the daughter should so much have tendered her father's vow, and he not hesitated to slay his child ; she been careful of her father's truth, he careless of his daughter's death !

But why did God in this case permit the crime, and prevent it in the former ? Is He a respecter of persons ? No ! but of holiness and virtue. The reason is plain ; God withheld Abraham from a crime, and

^f Gen. xxii. 12.

His doing so indicated His Will, it supplied the example which future ages were bound to follow. Perhaps, too, the difference of merit contributed to the difference in the event. The father *rent his clothes*, the daughter *bewailed*, both questioned God's mercy. Abraham lamented not; no sooner did he hear the divine command than he forgot he was a father, deferred not the sacrifice, but hastened to obey. Isaac hesitated not while following his father; wept not while being bound; begged for no respite when ready to be sacrificed. Where faith was more obedient, mercy was more abundant. Isaac fulfilled the interpretation of his name^s, he rejoiced in being offered to God, and was rewarded by deliverance; he was neither doubtful of God's mercy, nor anxious at his own sacrifice; but in the case of Jephthah there was none to arrest his hand, the cruel murder of his daughter was only a counterpart to his own demerit.

CHAP. III.

Of the particular vow of Chastity.

A SACRIFICE of human blood is offered and no man opposes; the oblation of chastity is made, and behold objectors. One father's vow can only be paid with blood, and it is paid; another vows the virginity of his daughter, and men grudge the loving and religious oblation. One daughter in tears offers her

^s Gen. xxi. 6.

blood to fulfil her father's vow ; another may neither for parent's love nor self-devotion willingly perform the religious vow.

And God's priests are blamed for maintaining the sacredness of the promise ! Yet did St. John Baptist condemn unlawful wedlock ; and is it not the same conduct as his, that is blamed in them ? What was the occasion of his passion and martyrdom but his words, *It is not lawful for thee to have her^h ?* Why, but because she was another man's wife ; and how much more truly may this be said of a virgin consecrated to God ! He rebuked a king ; are not others to be rebuked ? We have no Herod, (blessed be God !) but the world is as Herodias.

May no word be uttered for virginity ? It is written, *judge the fatherless, plead for the widowⁱ*, and that God is a *Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widows^k* ; are we then to abandon, yea, or condemn the holy virgins ?

Even among heathens virginity was respected ; though no religious merit was possible for them, or interior purity, yet the virginity of the flesh was had in honour. Shall pagan rites be graced by virgins, and virginity be excluded from the Church of God ? They were virgins by constraint, uninstructed in its merit ; with us priests are bound to teach it, and yet men would forbid it ! Privileges with them compensated for renouncing wedlock ; must our maidens be constrained to marry ? The pagan priest used force to

^h St. Matt. xiv. 4.

ⁱ Isaiah i. 17.

^k Psalm lxxviii. 5.

fill the number of the vestals ; are we to use force against the profession of chastity ? Rather let our priests endure the worst than fail to magnify the oblation of purity.

Consider that they were virgins who, in preference to Apostles, first saw the resurrection of the Lord. They were virgins who sat over against the sepulchre, the *new* sepulchre, as St. John calls it, or, as St. Matthew, the new tomb of *Joseph of Arimathæa*. It was a *new* tomb, lest it might be said that another and not Christ was risen ; it was the tomb of *just* Joseph, for Christ rises from the dead in the new affections of the just ; it was not the Lord's own tomb, for He who conquered death needed not a tomb of His own ; such do those only need, who are dead under the law. Mary then saw the resurrection, she first saw and believed ; Mary Magdalene too saw, though not all free from doubt.

CHAP. IV.

Bodily Chastity without faith and inward purity unprofitable.

AND take heed, ye virgins, lest ye too, like her, doubt of the resurrection of the Lord. Virginitv of the flesh is no merit, without integrity of the soul. St. Mary Magdalene was forbid to touch the Lord, for her faith still wavered¹ ; she toucheth Christ, who toucheth Him by faith.

¹ St. John xx.

On Holy Virginitie.

Mary Magdalene stood *without* at the sepulchre weeping. She sees not Christ's body, and thinks it lost, and because she stands *without* she weeps. St. Peter and St. John ran and *entered in*, they wept not but went away rejoicing. Because she went not in, she wept, believed not and thought Him taken away; nay! she believed not when she saw the Angels who asked her, *Woman! why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?* words repeated by the Lord, that we may know that Angels speak but what the Lord commands them.

Our Lord repeated the words, *Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?* *Woman*, in sign of want of faith, for he that believes rises to a perfect *man*, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; *woman*, in reproach not of her sex, but of the slowness of her faith; and note, that the *woman* still wavered, when the *virgin* had believed. *Why weepest thou?* Thou art thyself the cause of thy weeping; thou weepest as not seeing Christ; believe, and thou shalt see Him; He is here, He is never far away from such as seek Him. *Why weepest thou?* there needs not tears, but ready faith; cease from earthly thoughts, forget the passing things of time, and thou shalt have no cause to weep. Why weepest thou, where others joy?

Whom seekest thou? Dost thou not see that Christ is here? Seest thou not that Christ is the power of God, and the wisdom of God; that Christ is sanctity, Christ is chastity, Christ is perfectness; that Christ is

born of a Virgin; of the Father, and with the Father, and ever in the Father, begotten not made, unchangeable, ever beloved, very God of very God?

They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him. Woman, thou errest in thinking that Christ has been taken away, and not rather raised by His own power. No man has taken away the power of God, the wisdom of God, His adorable chastity: Christ is not taken away from the monument of the just, from the secret soul and holy thoughts of the virgin devoted to Him; none can take Him thence, though they would.

Mary, look on Me; before, He called her *woman*; now she begins to turn to Christ, He calls her by the name of her who bare Him, *Mary*; it is the soul, that spiritually beareth Christ. *Look on Me;* whoso looks on Christ receives amendment, while he sees not Christ he goes astray. She turned and looked on Him, and said, *Rabbi;* which is to say, *Master*: whoso looks on Christ, turns towards Him, beholds Him, and, seeing Him, advances towards perfection; so now Him whom she believed dead, she addresses and calls *Master*. He answered, *Touch Me not;* thou art but a beginner, thou still art wavering: *Touch Me not;* touch not the power of God, the wisdom of God, His adorable perfectness and purity. *But go to My brethren;* weep no more without; go to My elect, My most diligent priests, and say to them, *I ascend unto My Father and your Father, to My God and your God.* Move now no further question, go to the more

perfect and they shall tell thee, how He is My Father and how yours; Mine by divine generation, yours by adoption: *My Father*, He says, distinguishing Himself from creatures; *your Father*, indicating the grace of spiritual adoption. And of Him who naturally is His Father, He says, according to the mysterious sacrament of the Incarnation, *to My God*; adding, *and your God*, in sign of His mighty working in us, which floweth from that mystery.

CHAP. V.

The fewness of those who possess this grace.

FOR He has most truly become *our God* since the Passion of our Lord, since which time virginity has become a boon more precious than life itself. If any object, we must be patient; they, as we, are under grace, with them then we would be at peace, but their objections must be refuted; we accuse them not, but by their clamour they are their own accusers.

O that the praises of virginity were seconded by examples of holy virginity! We complain not that our words are accused; we lament that there is so little ground in fact for the accusation. Would that the charge could be proved against us by instances, and not clamour of mere words raised against us! The accusation is a praise, how little do we deserve it!

Maidens by holy mysteries initiated and conse-

crated to perpetual chastity, may not be borne away from the Holy Altar; are maidens, whom the world allows to choose their husbands, to be hindered, if they prefer ALMIGHTY GOD to wedlock? O that rather the betrothed could be recalled, and change the wedding raiment for the religious veil of chastity! Blessed are the priests who sow the seeds of purity, and inspire their flocks with the desire of virginity!

CHAP. VI.

Holy Virginity neither 1. blameworthy, nor 2. unscriptural.

Is their doing so either blameworthy, a novelty, or inexpedient? (1.) If it be blameworthy, so are all our prayers for a blessed resurrection, so is the life of Angels, whom in the resurrection we shall resemble; *They neither marry nor are given in marriage*^m. Such a state is proposed as our reward; can then its likeness upon earth be blameworthy, while the reality is the fruit and object of our prayers?

(2.) Or is it a novelty? If so, if Christ taught it not, who to the faithful is *the way*, we rightly abhor it and condemn it. But what saith the Lord: *There are eunuchs, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake*ⁿ. Surely that is a noble warfare, which is for the sake of the kingdom of Heaven, and great therefore is the praise our Lord has bestowed on unspotted purity. If it is so excellent,

^m St. Matt. xxii. 30.

ⁿ St. Matt. xix. 12.

we may say with the Apostles, *If the case of a man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry.* They deemed the yoke of wedlock heavy, and chose before it the grace of purity. But the Lord knew that while all praise it, few could practise it, and He answered, *All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given.* It is a thing allowed, not in condescension to our infirmity, but as a counsel of perfection, and so, after He had said, *there be eunuchs which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of Heaven's sake,* He added, *he that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*

Directly after these words, there were brought unto Him little children, that by His blessing, they, hitherto unspotted, might retain their purity; and of such is the kingdom of Heaven, of such as through ignorance of corruption return, as it were, to childhood with all its chastity. See how virginity is praised by a voice from Heaven, even by our Lord!

Mark well the teaching of our divine Saviour: no sooner had He forbidden the severance of wedlock, save for fornication, than He made mention of the gift of chastity; teaching us that holy wedlock is good, but that virginity is better; that he strays far from truth who condemns the former, yet is no less unreasonable if he shuts his eyes to its disadvantages; *for the unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband*°.

° 1 Cor. vii. 34.

Though in marrying she *sin* not, yet she shall have trouble in the flesh ; sharp are the pains of child-birth, and wearisome the bringing up of children. These however must not sever those who are united, for the Apostle has before said, *art thou bound by the tie of mutual love unto a wife, seek not to be loosed.*

The bonds of wedlock are therefore good, yet they are bonds ; the marriage tie is good, yet it is a tie, a tie to the world, *she careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.* Still, good as wedded love is, the severity of chastity is better than all its endearments ; nor is this strange, the outward act is often to appearance contradictory to the intention of the doer ; chastisement may proceed from the deepest affection, and an enemy may wear the guise of a friend, and so it is written, *faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful*^p. St. Peter wounded, Judas kissed ; poison was spread on the lips of one, and his kiss condemned him ; tears washed away the other's fault, and he rose more perfect : and even so, the Church joys in the wounds of chastity^q.

Let not him then who chooseth wedlock disparage virginity ; nor let him who preferreth virginity condemn wedlock : such as have done so, and dared to solve the marriage tie, holy Church hath condemned long since. Hear her own words : *Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field ; let us lodge in the villages ; let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine*

^p Prov. xxvii. 6.

^q Cant. ii. 5.

flourish^r. Many a field bears fruit, but that is fairest which abounds no less in flowers. Such is the Church's field; here are tender buds of fresh virginity flowering at spring-tide, there in the plains of the wood the gravity of serious widowhood, elsewhere the full harvest of faithful wedlock fills the granaries of the world, and the wedded vines make the presses of the Lord run over with abundance.

CHAP. VII.

Nor yet 3. inexpedient—Youthfulness is no bar to it.

(3.) FINALLY, is it inexpedient? The world is alarmed for itself, as though marriages are to be no more and the human race to be extinct. But what need of terror; has there ever in fact been a lack of persons willing to be brides? And as to ills arising from either state, broken wedlock has been the source of wars and destruction, but to none has consecrated virginity occasioned death, for it is higher than human law and beyond its sanctions; religion gives it its dignity, and its safeguard is the Faith.

Nor is there fear of the extinction of mankind. Facts have proved the contrary, and shewn that where virginity has been most honoured, there most mankind has multiplied. What multitudes of virgins were yearly consecrated at Alexandria, in the African Church, and throughout the East in the time of

^r Cant. vii. 11, 12.

Ambrose. Births were rarer in the West, than consecrations of virgins in the East. Even on this ground, then, let not virginity be thought unprofitable; yea, how profitable has it been, seeing that by a Virgin salvation came, to render fruitful the Roman world.

If ye will urge this futile argument, pause and see whither it will carry you. It will lead you to defend the violation of wedlock, if thereby mankind may be more multiplied.

The wedded need not be alarmed, they have their wives; for the unwedded man, whom has he to blame but himself, if he seek a maiden who he knows beforehand will not be a bride? Fathers need not fear, for if other maidens are consecrated, their daughters may be the sooner chosen.

“At least,” one may say, “let none be veiled too young.” Nor is it denied that caution must be used by the priest, and no maid be veiled unwarily. He ought to regard her age, measured however by her faith and dread of evil. Let her love of purity be the measure of her years, her seriousness be counted for grey hairs; let him examine the gravity of her behaviour, the ripeness of her modesty, and the incorruption of her spirit; let him see that her mother, who is her guardian, be trustworthy, her companions discreet. Such an one is already grown grey in maidenhood. Years make not the difference, but disposition.

Youthfulness is no bar in itself; years did not advance St. Thecla, but holiness. Each age is perfected

in Christ, and can do God service; holiness is the substance, what matters it whether it be clad in the vest of childhood or old age? Innocents have suffered martyrdom, why may not girls profess virginity? for it is written, *out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast Thou ordained strength*^s. Infancy followed Christ unto death, may not childhood follow Him as far as continence? Children followed Christ in the *desert*, (for there were women and children fed with the five loaves over and above the five thousand men,) may not youthful virgins follow Him to His *kingdom*?

Forbid not then the little children to come to Christ; they suffered martyrdom for Him, and *of such is the kingdom of Heaven*. He calls them; *Suffer them to come unto Me*^t; and will you forbid? Forbid not the young maidens, of whom it is written, *Therefore do the virgins love Thee, and they brought Thee into their mother's house*^u. Separate not those little ones from the love of Christ, whom they confessed while yet unborn, and leapt in their mother's womb for joy.

CHAP. VIII.

When and where the Virgin must seek for Christ.

TIME and place are but accidents; God's mercy is not limited to places; the holy Virgin is pronounced *blessed* by the Angel within a house; and David

^s Psalm viii. 2.

^t St. Matt. xix. 14.

^u Cant. i. 3; viii. 2.

anointed for a prophet ; within doors, abroad on the way or in the desert, everywhere Christ heals ; on the way the issue of blood was staunched, in an inner room Jairus' daughter raised to life, and in the desert the people sought Him that He might heal them. Neither is any time too early to seek for Christ. It is written in St. Luke, *When the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him, and He laid His hands* (thus proving Himself both God and man) *on every one of them and healed them ; and when it was day—the people sought Him.* The setting sun and the darkness of night agree well with the pains and groans of the diseased ; the daylight with the people's faith and the gladness of the healed ; *heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning ;* what greater joy than to follow Christ into solitude ?

Let those who devote themselves to Christ learn from His divine charity, He healed the sick in multitudes ; and like Him let them withdraw into solitude and shun display ; let them if they would share in His healing mercy, withdraw from the city, from wantonness and luxury, and as He knew not softness, so let His followers dwell in the world as in a hot sandy desert, let them mortify their earthly frame, let their bodies faint with hunger unappeased, and their lips be parched with unsatisfied thirst.

We cannot seek Christ too soon ; when the sun rose the people sought Him. Let not night overtake us, for he only departeth not from Christ who walks

in the light. Let us then follow Him in the day-time, now is the Church's day, which Abraham saw and was glad; at night He will not be found, *by night on my bed I sought Him whom my soul loveth, I sought Him but I found Him not; I called Him but He gave me no answer.*

Think not that Christian maidens can serve their Lord equally in the world. He is not found in the crowd of men and the thronged thoroughfares; thus speaks the Church in the Song of Songs, *I will rise now and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek Him whom my soul loveth*: she did not find Him; *I sought Him*, she says, *but I found Him not, I called Him but He gave me no answer.* Let us not seek Him where we shall fail to find Him. He does not wander in the market-place, for Christ is peace, but in the world is strife; Christ is righteousness, in the world is iniquity; Christ is energy, in the world is vacant sloth; Christ is charity, in the world is detraction; Christ is good faith, in the world is fraud and circumvention; Christ is in the Church, in the world idolatry; and in the Church the widow is righted, in the world she is oppressed. Shun then, Christian virgins, the public walks, shun the places of public concourse; shun the hot ball room; the worldly bazaar (the more worldly because hypocritical); the fashionable watering-place; ay, and the Church, which should be God's house of prayer, but which is made the scene of man's display and man's idolatry, where Christ's little ones, the poor and

wretched, cannot (for delicacy and pride exclude them) come to worship. Impurity lieth in wait in the public streets; ponder the warning of the Wise Man in the book of Proverbs, *Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: that they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger that flattereth with her words,*^x—*her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*

Woe to us if, when we seek Him, we find Him not! and woe to us if we seek Him where we ought not; if we seek Him in the houses or conventicles of the teachers of dissent and heresy, who falsely assume the name of teachers; if we seek Him with self-will and not humbly in His Church. Often is the Church grievously wounded through this our wilfulness: *the watchmen, this is her own complaint, that went about the city found me, they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my cloak from me.* Let not, O virgins, our Mother suffer through our self-will; let not our *cloak*, the garment of discretion, the symbol of endurance (how unlike the soft clothing of them who dwell in kings' houses), be taken from us; the *cloak* of doctrine worn by Christ and left by Him to His Apostles, let it not be taken from thee; only as He bids thee give thy *cloak* also to him who shall take thy *coat*, be ready to array the ignorant and naked in the vesture of thy discretion, and impart to him the symbol of thy Master's doctrine.

^x Prov. vii. 4—27.

CHAP. IX.

From whom the Virgin must seek Christ—what she must be that He may seek her.

LET us, Christian maidens, seek Christ where the Church seeks Him, on the mountains of fragrant smell, that is, from religious priests, who, living in exalted holiness, like hills whose tops are covered with sweet flowers, breathe forth the odour of perfection. Christ shuns the din of men, the busy marketplace, the public walks, the restless concourse: *Make haste my Beloved, and be Thou like to a roe or to a young hart upon the mountains of spices.* The wily adder, the snarling dog, the groveling, earth-bound serpent His soul hateth, He dwells in the elevated heights of holiness; in such daughters of the Church alone is His abode who can say, *we are unto God a sweet odour of Christ.* There is an odour of death unto death, even in them that perish; in them is the odour of life unto life, who with a quick and living faith exhale the sweet-smelling odour of the Resurrection, and, risen with Christ, set their affection on things above.

Blessed Joseph of Arimathea and St. Nicodemus were *mountains of spices*, they took the body of Jesus and wound it in linen clothes with spices; so also are all who believe that Jesus died and was buried and rose again, they too crown the hill-top of true faith with the blossoms of holiness.

Where then is Christ to be sought? In the heart and from the lips of His discreet and prudent ministers. But this is not all; How must we come prepared, that we may find Him?

We have seen that the people sought Him in the desert; and He says Himself, *I am the rose of Sharon's plain, and the lily of the valleys; as the lily among thorns.* He may be found in various places; and virgins blest with various (but all harmonious) graces may find Him. *I am the rose of Sharon's plain;* see how He loves the simple open-heartedness of a pure virgin soul: *and the lily of the valleys,* the emblem not of luxury, of pleasure, or of wantonness, but of simplicity and lowliness: *as a lily among thorns;* the flower of fragrant smell springs amid the roughnesses of sharp discipline, and from a broken heart; a broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise, yea, my God, Thou lovest.

This is, Christian maidens, the true *wilderness and solitary place* that shall *be glad*, the true *desert* that is bid *rejoice and blossom as the rose*^v. In this wilderness is the good Tree that bringeth forth good fruit, that spreads forth its arms in holy deeds, and whose head is God. Let us, the trees of the wood, send forth branches in like manner, for, *as the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my Beloved among the sons;* so may the Church rejoice and be glad, and say, *I sat down under His shadow with great de-*

^v Isaiah xxxv. 1.

light, and His fruit was sweet to my taste^z; yea, let her say, joyful at the issue of our faith, *He brought me to the banqueting-house, and His banner over me was love*^a. Love cannot be where there is not faith; the three sureties of the Church are faith, hope, and love; when hope has gone before and the foundation of faith has been laid, the banner of love is lifted up, and holy Church is made one in herself and with her Lord.

CHAP. X.

The Virgin must put off the flesh, that He may seek her.

YE have heard, daughters of the Church, how ye are to seek Christ; hear also how ye may deserve His search for you. Call then for the Holy Spirit with the Church's prayer, *Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits*^b. The garden of the Word is the soul that blossoms with the flowers of spring, that is, with Christian virtues, and *His pleasant fruits* are the fruits of holiness. Whether thou eat or drink, if thou call Him, Christ is present and saith, *Come, eat of My bread and drink of the wine which I have mingled*^c; yea, if thou sleep, He cometh to the door and knocks. Often He comes and *puts in His hand by the hole of the door*^d, yet not to all,

^z Cant. ii. 3.^c Prov. ix. 5.^a Cant. ii. 4.^b Cant. iv. 16: v. 1.^d Cant. v. 4.

but only to the soul that can say, *I put off my coat at night*^e. O Christian soul, ere Christ will come to thee, even as He put off the flesh, that for thy sake He might triumph over the principalities and powers of the world, so must thou, in the dark night of this life, put off the vest of the life of sense.

Hear the spiritual meaning of the words of the virgin soul; *I have put off my coat, how shall I put it on?* I have put off the deeds of the body and of earth, and even though I would, I know not how to resume them. Shame forbids return to them, and virgin modesty, nay, memory fails me, for chastity of conversation by long continuance blots out the recollection of past impurity. *I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?* A twofold meaning is contained in the washing of the feet. It is a symbol of humility, as it is written, *If I, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye ought also to wash one another's feet*^f; and it is a mystery of the faith, as it is written, *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with Me*^g. This was said to blessed Peter, how great need then have our feet of washing! and how careful must we be of soiling them, for of a second washing there is no promise. Holy Church saith not, *I have washed my feet, how shall I again wash them?* but *how shall I defile them?* and in agreement with the sensible figure we must wash out all traces of bygone defilement. Once, Christian virgins, your feet defiled with sin, have been washed in the fount whose springs are in

^e Cant. v. 3.

^f St. John xiii. 14.

^g St. John xiii. 8.

eternity, once cleansed in the sacramental mystery ; beware lest they be soiled again by the uncleanness of desire, or polluted by the filthy mire of unchastened acts. Would ye learn how to secure them from defilement, hear the beloved Psalmist, *Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem*^h. This Jerusalem is not the earthly but the heavenly oneⁱ, the city of the living God, and we plant our feet therein, as the Apostle teaches us, by having *our conversation in Heaven*^k, living in constant virtue, righteous deeds and living faith.

CHAP. XI.

Then will He anoint her with incorruption.

WHOSO thus liveth may say, *My Beloved put in His hand by the hole of the window, and my bowels were moved for Him : I rose up to open to my Beloved*^l. It is good that our inward parts be moved at the approach of the Lord. If the Blessed Mary was moved when the Angel came in to her, well may we be moved when Christ comes to us. When God imparts His Divine Presence to us, our bodies forget the affections of sense, and our outward man is lost, and is as though it were not. Be thou also moved, holy maiden, and as Israel, by God's command, ate the Paschal

^h Psalm cxxii. 2.

^k Phil. iii. 20.

ⁱ Heb. xii. 22.

^l Cant. v. 4.

Lamb in haste^m, haste thou too, arise, open the door, for Christ is there and knocketh at the thresholdⁿ: if thou open, He will enter in, and the Father will enter with Him.

Not only when He is entered does He leave a reward; He forestalls His entrance with a blessing. The soul is still thrilling, still in the darkness of the night is it feeling the walls of its house, still seeking for the door whereat Christ is standing, still loosing itself from the bonds of the flesh and the thralldom of the body; Christ is still knocking without, when (it is written), *my hands dropped with myrrh and my fingers with sweet-smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock*^o; *myrrh*, the fragrant odour of faith, drops from the hands of the chaste soul; that myrrh which was the offering of righteous Nicodemus the master in Israel, who first had grace to hear the mystery of the Baptismal laver^p and brought at the entombment a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight, and wound the spices in linen clothes with the body of the Lord^q. His offering was an emblem of the fragrancy of faith, wherewith the soul that begins to open the door to Christ and is buried with Him in Baptism, receives, first of all, the grace of the Lord's burial; even burial without corruption. For how could the flesh of Him whose name is as ointment poured forth, see corruption or any smell of death pass over it; yea, seasoned by the fragrant flower of Divinity, an everlasting and

^m Exod. xii. 11.

ⁿ Cant. v. 2.

^o Cant. v. 5.

^p St. John iii. 1.

^q St. John xix. 39.

an evergreen, it rose again; and in its resurrection our flesh too is raised by communication of the *ointment poured forth*^r.

This ointment, that seasoneth all whereon it is poured, was indeed from all eternity, but it was with the Father and in the Father. Contained in Heaven as in a vessel, it was shed only on Angels and Archangels; then opened the Father His mouth and said, *Lo! I have given Thee for a covenant of the people*^s, *and for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth*; the Son came down and all things were filled with the new odour of the Word. The Father's heart uttered a good Word^t, the Son was the fragrant odour, and the Holy Ghost breathed it forth and shed Himself abroad, throughout the hearts of all; *The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost*^u.

This fragrant ointment the Incarnate Son poured not forth at once, but confining it in His sacred body as in a vessel, He waited the appointed time; *The Lord God, He saith, hath given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak in season*^x. The hour came, He opened His mouth, virtue went out of Him, and He poured forth the sweet savour of the ointment. It was poured forth upon the Jews, it was gathered by the Gentiles; it was poured forth in Judea, its fragrance spread throughout all lands. Herewith anointed, Holy Mary the Blessed Virgin con-

^r Cant. i. 2.^s Isaiah xlii. 6; xlix. 6.^t Psalm xlv. 1.^u Rom. v. 5.^x Isaiah l. 4.

ceived, the Blessed Virgin bare the odour of sweetness, the Son of God; this ointment was shed forth upon the waters, and endued them with the power of sanctifying; the Three Children were anointed with this ointment, and the fiery furnace bedewed them with cool moisture^y; herewith was Daniel anointed, and the lions' mouths were tamed, and their fierceness soothed^z.

Daily this ointment floweth and never faileth. Virgin, take thy vessel, draw near that thou mayest be filled with the ointment. Receive the precious ointment of spikenard, valued at three hundred pieces, receive it without money and without price, freely given, that all may have it freely. Receive the anointing, Christian virgin, grudge not like Judas that it is poured forth for burial, be thou buried with thy Lord, and be partaker in His entombment, see that Christ be buried in thee, so shalt thou, like Him, not see corruption. Take heed to thy vessel and close it fast, lest the ointment run out and it be lost. Close it with the key of perpetual purity and unblemished virginity, with shamefacedness in speech, with lowliness and humility.

Blessed art thou, pure virgin soul, if thou possess this ointment; for as she that had it said, *I opened to my Beloved and He passed by*^a, so shall thy Beloved, the Lord Jesus, *pass by* into the inmost of thy soul; so shalt thou be privileged to partake of that which

^y Dan. iii. 23. [Song of Three Child. 27.]

^z Dan. vi. 22.

^a Cant. v. 6.

Simeon prophesied to the Mother of thy God, *A sword shall pass through thine own soul also*^b; for what else is that sword but the living Word of God, a sharp and piercing sword, that penetrateth all earthly thoughts, yea, every barrier, and searcheth the inmost recesses of the heart ?

CHAP. XII.

The Virgin must watch and wait for Christ.

MEDITATE, thou pure one,—I speak not to you, once washed in holy Baptism, yet, daughters of the world! I speak not to you, whose raiment, ill-befitting a Christian virgin, seems to indicate your greater wealth or higher rank in proportion to its unseemly exposure of that which maiden modesty would hide; Christ loveth not the rustling of your silks, the splendour of your satins, your broidered hair, the glittering of your attire, your chains of gold, your necklaces and bracelets, your stomachers of sparkling gems and ear-rings of bright jewels, vanities of the Evil One, slaves to whom, ye spend upon these baubles the earthly substance whereof ye are God's unfaithful stewards for His Church and the Church's poor, vanities which are sources of bickering and envy, jealousy and strife;—but thou pure one, perchance of no exalted station, perchance of lowly

^b St. Luke ii. 35.

birth, or child of poverty and worldly wretchedness, virgin not alone in body but in the snowy whiteness of an untainted soul, since thou resemblest more the glorious Church, that has not spot or wrinkle, who, in the Song of Songs holds intercourse with Christ, do thou like her, on thy bed in the night-season, seek in thy meditation Him whom thy soul loveth; cease not to watch and hope for His appearing.

If He seem to thee to tarry, arise; He seems to tarry because thou slumberest; He seems to tarry because thou ceasest to be instant in prayer; He seems to tarry because thou liftest not up thy voice in Psalms. Devote the first-fruits of thy vigils to Christ; sacrifice the first-fruits of thine actions to Christ. Hear His voice calling thee, *Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse, come with Me from Lebanon; look from the head of Amana*^c. What is *Amana's* stream, the stream of Truth, save Baptism, across whose flood thou passest to thy conflict with the world; and what its fountain-head save Christ, whom when thou hast apprehended, thou shalt look back in triumph on thy baffled foe? He hath separated thee *from the lion's dens, from the mountains of the leopards*, that is, from the incursions of spiritual wickednesses; the beauty of thy Christian graces is pleasant in His eyes; *How much better*, saith He, *is the smell of thine ointments*, that is, the fragrancy of thy virgin integrity, *than all spices! the smell of thy garments is like the smell of the frankincense of Lebanon. A garden enclosed is*

^c Cant. iv. 8, &c.

My sister, My spouse; thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits. Seek from Him then, that the Holy Spirit may breathe on thee, may breathe upon thy bed and enhance the fragrancy of thy pure piety and spiritual grace. Surely He will hear and He will answer thee; *I sleep*, saith He, *but My heart waketh*^d.

Thou hearest His voice as He knocketh at the door, *Open to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, My undefiled*; His *love*, because thou lovest; His *dove*, for as a dove thou art simple and harmless; His *undefiled*, for thou art a virgin. *My head is filled with dew*; as the dew of heaven at even-tide allayeth the dryness the sun has caused, and cooleth the night-fall, so the dew of our Lord, Jesus Christ, fresheneth the thick darkness of this world with the moisture of life eternal. This is the *head* which the blazing heat of this world cannot parch; on Him, as man, the Spirit was poured without measure, the sap of life could not be drained in Him, so that He truly was the Tree of Life, ever flourishing though under the scorching sun of this world's vanity. Therefore He calls Himself a green tree, as in the holy Gospel He saith, *If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry*^e? and the dew wherewith Christ's head is filled, is more than enough to preserve itself from dryness, it drops besides on those that are His body; it drops in plenty yet is never spent, and its full tide, though ever flowing, fails not. *My locks,*

^d Cant. v. 2.^e St. Luke xxiii. 31.

saith He, *are filled with the drops of the night* ; upon His head the razor came not ; He is the Prince of Peace, and steel is the sign and implement of war, therefore are His *locks* unshorn ; and they are filled with *the drops of the night*, the meaning of which we have already seen, even the dew of the Holy Spirit, which refreshes the parched and weary soul, watering the dry and sun-baked soil that it may bear flowers of virtue and fruits of holiness. But we must not haste too fast ; His locks are, as of a holy Nazarite, unshorn, the razor hath not touched His sacred head ; yet how unlike the ringlets of the wanton daughters of fashion, dressed with crimping-pins, curled and plaited with a hireling's art, divided hither and thither with minutest care, redolent with luxurious perfumes and scented oils, these are not ornaments but criminal devices ; not the modest head-gear of the virtuous maiden, but impure allurements to unchaste thoughts and enticements of a soul, if not a body, the victim of prostitution. These haughty daughters of England, who walk with outstretched neck and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, despise the degraded and wretched woman whom deceit has lured, or agonizing poverty has driven from the paths of virtue ; think you that their virtue would be proof, if the fear of public infamy were withdrawn, against the deed of sin, when now so many acts imply that the thought of sin is no stranger to their minds ?

His locks unshorn shine with the unction of all

holy graces ; this is the ſpiritual meaning of Samſon's hiſtory : while the true Nazarite has his locks unſhorn he is invincible, but if he loſe them, loſe theſe Chriſtian virtues, his ſtrength falls proſtrate, and when the tempter cries, *The Philiftines be upon thee*, he finds the Lord departed from him.

Seeing that all this is true, ſeek not to reſume the *coat* of earthly deeds which thou haſt once put off^f ; neither think that carefulneſs is needleſs to avoid it, it often meets thine eyes, inviting thee to put it on, and it is often offered thee by ſpiritual wickedneſs. Forget how to put it on, ſo forget aſ not to know how to put it on again, even if thou wouldſt at any time ; and aſ thou heareſt the Lord knocking at the door, in thrilling hope riſe at the ſound, unſhackled from all affections of the body ; aſ thou art riſing, prepare thy inward ſoul with prayers that thou mayſt ſtrive to riſe from earth heavenwards, and to open the door of thy heart.

Aſ thou mov'eſt towards Chriſt, thy actions will breathe the odour of faith, aſ it is written, *I roſe up to open to my Beloved, and my hands dropped with myrrh and my fingers with ſweet-smelling myrrh*. Lift up thine hands and ſmell their fragrancŷ ; follow, aſ it were, the ſcent of holineſs in thine actions, with unwearied and ever-watchful alacritŷ. The ſweet ſmell of thy right hand will gladden thee, all thy limbs, when thou riſeſt, will be redolent with the fragrancŷ of the Reſurrection, and thy fingers will drop with

^f Cant. v. 3.

myrrh, that is, thy spiritual deeds shall be perfumed with the grace of true faith. Thus then, O virgin, thou wilt take delight in thy inward self, thou wilt be pleasant to thyself and lovely to thyself, and thou wilt begin to lose, what sinners are ever feeling, that harassing vexation with thyself; the body and the world will lose their charms, and thy simplicity, divested of the cloak of sin and worldliness, will be thy happiness.

If thou be such, then Christ desires thee; if thou be such, Christ hath chosen thee. Open then thy heart's door, and as He has promised (for He is faithful) He will enter in. Embrace Him whom thou hast sought; come near to Him and thou shalt be illuminated; hold Him, entreat Him not to leave thee, implore Him not to depart; otherwise He will go from thee, for the Word of God *runneth very swiftly*; lukewarmness cannot take Him, carelessness cannot hold Him. Let thy soul wait upon Him in His Word, press close upon His footsteps, for He quickly passeth by.

Yet as the Church saith, *I sought Him but I could not find Him; I called Him but He gave me no answer*^g; think not because He so soon leaveth thee, that therefore He is offended with thee. Thou calledst, didst entreat Him, and openedst to Him, yet He is gone, and why? To prove thee; and often He thus suffers us to be tempted. Call to mind also His words to the multitudes that besought Him not to depart from them; He said, *To other cities also must I preach the*

^g Cant. v. 6.

Word of God ; for therefore am I sent^h. Still if He seem to depart from thee, stand not idle, but go forth and again seek for Him. And now that thou art a virgin devoted to God, fear no more (as thou must once have feared) those watchmen (in their spiritual sense) who patrol the world ready to apprehend all that wander there ; fear them no more as they go about the city ; fear no more the woundsⁱ which cannot hurt such as follow Christ. Let them arrest thy body, that is, take away thy natural life, what matters it, Christ is near thee. When thou hast found Him, O then learn where thou mayest abide with Him, lest, through thy negligence, He quit thee ; and if thou wilt learn this, hear the teaching of holy Church.

CHAP. XIII.

The Virgin must watch her heart, her eye, her ear, her tongue.

FOR who but holy Church can teach thee how to retain Christ ? yea, she hath already taught thee, if thou wilt only hear her. She says, *It was but a little that I passed from them* (that is, from the persecutors, the evil powers of this world), *but I found Him whom my soul loveth ; I held Him and would not let Him go*^k. How then is Christ held ? Not by chains of violence, not by tightened ropes ; He is bound by the ties of love, by spiritual cords, by affection of the heart.

^h St. Luke iv. 43.ⁱ Cant. v. 7.^k Cant. iii. 4.

Wouldst thou too retain Christ, seek Him perpetually, fear not punishment, fear not torments; nay, thou mayest more surely find Christ, when in the hands of persecutors. *It was but a little*, says the Church, *that I passed from them, but I found Him whom my soul loveth*; no sooner shalt thou have passed from the persecutors' hands, that is, no sooner have so resisted the powers of the world as not to fall under them, than Christ will meet thee, and will not suffer thee to be long tempted.

Then may the virgin who thus seeks Christ and finds Him say, *I held Him and would not let Him go, until I had brought Him into my mother's house and into the chamber of her that conceived me*¹. What is thy *mother's house*, and *her chamber*, but the secret chambers of thy inward nature? Keep carefully this house, cleanse the inner rooms of this house, that it may be uncontaminated, and, unsoiled by the filthiness of a corrupt conscience, may grow up unto a spiritual house joined together by the Corner-stone, into a holy priesthood and dwelling of the Holy Ghost. No maiden who thus seeks Christ and thus entreats Him, shall be abandoned by Him; nay, far otherwise, He will often visit her, for He is with us even unto the end of the world.

Thou hast heard, Christian maiden, how Christ is found and retained; even He who in the Church's words, *put in His hand by the hole* of the window^m; by which *window* is meant, that eye of the mind, that

¹ Cant. iii. 4.

^m Cant. v. 4.

spiritual sight, through which we see the works of Christ. And thus, O virgin, let Christ come to thee; through this window let Christ put His hand to thee, and let the love of Him, the Word, displace all other and alone possess thee. If thou wouldst have Him do thus, prepare thyself, cleanse the windows of thy soul, and let no dust of sinful acts obscure them. Let not a virgin's eyes exhibit aught offensive or corrupt; far from them be soft, unchastened blandishments, far from them the languishing allurements which separate from Christ.

Nor let the ear, framed to receive holy instruction, be made a means of vanity. Why should a Christian virgin's ear be pierced to carry brilliant pendants; it needs no meretricious ornaments, the only one she seeks is this, to hear and listen to the wholesome precepts of her teachers.

Learn too in the *night-time*, that is, in the darkness of this world, to keep thy *door*, even the door of thy lips, closed to all save Christ: yea, let Him too, when He cometh, find it closed, nor open it until He call thee. Is it not written, *a garden enclosed is My sister, My spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed?* Open not thy lips to vain gossiping: nay, speak not on holy things, unless with Christ; for what hast thou to do with others? speak with Christ alone, with Him only hold converse. If women are commanded, as it is written, to keep silence in the Church, how much more are virgins and devout widows! The enemy of chastity is ever in wait to take advan-

tage; a casual word may drop which thou wouldst fain recal.

Had the door of Eve's lips been kept by her fast closed, she had not given answer to the serpent's questions and Adam had not been deceived. *Death came in by the window*ⁿ, by the mouth of Eve; even so by thy mouth death comes in, if thou speak either falsely, immodestly, wantonly, or unseasonably. Let then the doors of thy lips be closed, the threshold of thy voice be barred, then only to be unfastened when thou hearest the voice of God, and the Word of God speaketh to thee.

And so shall thy hands drop with myrrh and thou shalt smell the fragrancy of Baptismal grace; dead with Christ to the elements of the world, buried with Him and wound in spices, thou shalt also rise with Him from the dead. Why are your maxims still as though living in the world? Touch not, taste not, handle not what it has to offer, things which, while they are being used, tend to corruption^o. Chastity has nought in common with corruption; bury, therefore, all worldly and fleshly cares. *Ye who are risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is; and if ye seek Christ, ye see God the Father, for Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.*

The virgin that seeks Christ must shun the gaze of men, avoid the public streets and crowded walks; let not her voice be shrill; let her gait be staid, herself

ⁿ Jer. ix. 21.

^o Col. ii. 20, 21, &c.

unheard, unseen. The Apostle would have your converse all unearthly, yea, rising on spiritual wings almost beyond your nature, upwards to Heaven; *Set your affection*, he says, *on things above, and not on things on the earth*. And, for that this cannot be while ye are yet imprisoned in the flesh, and the soul, while the body lives, is still bound in a measure by its law, and cannot rise freely heavenwards, the holy Apostle adds, *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God*: if hid with Christ, let it not appear to the world, for Christ also is to the world dead, and lives to God.

Thus hast thou seen how Christ would have thee desire Him; not with vain talking mayest thou unclosethy lips, but to Him alone; and when thou hast opened to Him, He passeth through to the secret chambers of thy heart, and thy *soul shall fail when He speaketh*^p, *fail* and find in the world no stay, but abide in Christ and rest in Him.

CHAP. XIV.

Angels will watch over the Virgin.

AGAIN is it written, *I sought Him but I could not find Him*^q: He will withdraw Himself to try thee, to prove thy love.

^p Cant. v. 6.

^q Cant. v. 6.

The keepers of the walls found me^r: we have already seen one interpretation of the *watchmen*, viz. the wicked who watch for the just and are permitted to trouble them, and who do indeed prevail against such as will not persevere. There is another and a more consoling interpretation. We read of a city whose gates are ever open; *The gates of it shall not at all be shut by day, for there shall be no night there; and they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it*^s. This, O virgin, is that Jerusalem, which is in Heaven, wherein thou art already kept perfect and undefiled; *for there in no wise entereth into it any thing common*^t or unclean, and such is not chastity, such is not modesty; they are written in the *Lamb's Book of Life*^t.

If we have found this holy city, let us enter therein; let us behold its light, its walls, its tribes, the foundations of its walls, and the watchmen thereof. But how enter therein? In this city is life, and there is one way to life, even Christ; let us therefore follow Christ. The city is in Heaven; how ascend thither? The Evangelist teaches us in the Revelations, *The Spirit led me to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of Heaven*. Let us ascend in the spirit, flesh cannot mount thither. Let us thus ascend towards Heaven, that she may descend to us, *who hath the glory of God, whose light is like unto a stone most precious, even like*

^r Cant. v. 6.^s Rev. xxi. 25.^t Rev. xxi. 27.

a jasper stone, clear as crystal ; that hath a wall great and high ; that hath twelve gates, and at the gates twelve Angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel, and its wall hath twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb^u. The Apostles are the foundations of the heavenly city, and the Corner-stone is Christ, in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord^x. The city hath the glory of God ; within, without, everywhere is God ; wherefore do ye too, holy virgins and all ye righteous, cherish unspotted chastity of soul, for ye are fellow-citizens of the Saints, and of the household of God^y. Then shall ye inherit the dignity of your heavenly country, if ye seek Christ within the bounds of this holy city, whereunto ye enter by faith and the precious pearls^z of holy deeds, illumined by the light of Patriarchs, founded upon the Apostles, and having your conversation amid Angels.

The keepers of the walls took away my cloak from me. As we are now meditating on a second sense of the *keepers of the walls*, there is a corresponding variety in the explanation of *their taking away the cloak*. Above, we saw that the *cloak* that was taken away from the wanderer in the market-place and streets, signified the garment of discretion which is lost by mixing in the world ; here the Angels take away the cloak, by which we are to learn that God is

^u Rev. xxi. 11—14.

^y Eph. ii. 19.

^x Eph. ii. 21.

^z Rev. xxi. 21.

merciful to all, that many who are obliged to mix in worldly matters may still find Christ if they seek Him continually (O that we too may be partakers of grace with them !), that they who earnestly seek Him in the *night-time*^a of worldly business, in the courts of law or the busy mart, thus finding even in the world, the city of our God; in the court-house, a type of the divine tribunal; and in the crowded streets, a Christian brotherhood, who assemble at the supper of the Lord; such as these may meet the Angels in the city of God, and be by them stripped of the cloak of earthly thoughts and earthly deeds. They may say with holy David, *Lord, have I not remembered Thee in my bed*^b? and they follow his counsel, *Ye that by night stand in the house of the Lord, lift up your hands in the sanctuary*^c.

Nay, not only are we led to see here on earth a figure of things above, our thoughts are raised to the heavenly city itself, the awful seat of everlasting justice, and to the streets which are watered with a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, of which it is written, *Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets*^d. Here, if we seek Christ, we shall be found by the Angels.

To proceed; *They smote me, they wounded me.* There is a sword that wounds, but heals in wounding. The Word of God is a good sword, and its strokes

^a Cant. iii. 1.

^c Psalm cxxxiv. 2.

^b Psalm lxiii. 7.

^d Prov. v. 16.

are health-giving. There is a wound which love inflicts, a sickness that harmeth not, as it is written, *I am sick of love^e*, and this is the sickness of the perfect virgin, whose sole desire and earnest longing is Christ. The wounds inflicted by the Word of God are blessed, for, *The kisses of an enemy are deceitful, but faithful are the wounds of a friend*. Rebecca was thus wounded and sick of love, when she left her parents to become the wife of Isaac^f; so likewise was Rachel, who envied her sister and loved her husband^g, she envied her sister's fruitfulness, for she was herself barren, a type of holy Church, of whom it is written, *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child^h*.

This, therefore, is the second sense of the words of the Song of Songs: the keepers or the Angels strip the virgin of her cloak of mortality and earthly deeds, that in purest simplicity of soul she may seek Christ. So long as she is clad in the cloak of worldly wisdom, she cannot find Him; *Beware*, saith blessed Paul, *lest any man make a spoil of you through philosophyⁱ*: when she is arrayed in simple purity, then she draws near to Christ the Word and finds Him, and then shall she see God; *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God^k*.

^e Cant. ii. 5.

^h Isaiah liv. 1.

^f Gen. xxiv. 58.

ⁱ Col. ii. 8.

^g Gen. xxx. 1.

^k St. Matt. v. 8.

CHAP. XV.

Her Lord shall guide the affections of the Virgin's soul.

SEEK Him, O virgin, yea let us all seek Him, men and women (the sexes of our souls are not different), with prayer and supplications let us call Him to us, that like a fair *south wind*¹ He may breathe upon us and *blow upon our garden* the freshening gale of the heavenly Word, that breaks not the fruitful trees therein with rude blast, but gently moves them with its kindly breeze. The soul is, as it were, wedded to the body, whose more masculine and fervid heat it calms and tempers; and so it is written, *my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadab*^m. The soul is, while joined to the body, as a chariot drawn by restive horses, and it looks for an *Amminadab* to rule them. Amminadab was the father of Naasson, the prince of the tribe of Judahⁿ, and is a figure of Christ the true prince of His people, who, as a charioteer, directs with the reins of His Word, the soul of the righteous, lest it be carried headlong by the fury of its steeds. These horses are the four passions of wrath, avarice, desire, fear; when these are harnessed to the soul and begin to draw it, it is bewildered; *the corruptible body presseth down the soul*^o, commits

¹ Cant. iv. 16.

ⁿ Num. i. 7.

^m Cant. vi. 12.

^o Wisdom ix. 15.

it, against its will, to the mercy of brute force, which whirls it violently in the eddy of worldly cares, till the fiery steeds are tamed by the power of the Word.

The Word, like a skilful charioteer, would secure the soul, itself not liable to death, against the fearful tossing caused by its wild horses. First he will check the rapidity of their course and rein them in by the curb of reason; then guard against the inequality of their motions, lest they get entangled, and one by its viciousness infect, its lagging retard, or its restiveness throw into confusion, the rest. The fretful horse at once endangers the chariot, and harasses his yoke-fellow; his fretfulness the skilful charioteer allays by gentleness, and He who is figured here diverts His steeds from the winding road of error, and guides them to the open plain of truth. The upward course is safe, but the down-hill road is perilous. At length, their labours ended, the soul's affections, obedient to the yoke of the Word, are brought to the manger of the Lord, where their food, no longer earthly, is that Bread which came down from Heaven. Smooth and unhampered are the wheels of this chariot, and free from all obstruction, and of them the prophet speaks when he says, *The spirit of life was in the wheels* ^p.

^p Ezek. i. 20.

CHAP. XVI.

Modesty and confidence needful for the Virgin.

BUT to return to the Song of Songs : the Word of God is called too the *garden of nuts* ^q, emblems of the study of the prophets as well as of the grace bestowed on Christian priests, whose sore temptations are figured by the almond's bitterness, their toils by the hardness of its shell, their fruits of inward holiness by its hidden kernel. A like figure was the blossoming of Aaron's rod, it was in its own nature dead, but by a secret and Divine power it *brought forth buds, bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds* ^r. Let Him then come down into His garden, gather the vintage of faith, receive the fragrant odours, find the spiritual food, and feast on the sweetness of our honey ; as Himself saith, *I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse : I have gathered My myrrh with My spice ; I have eaten My honey-comb with My honey* ^s. The sweet compound, collected from the flowers of Christian holiness by the toil of those bees whose active labour is in agreement with the wisdom which they preach, is by holy Church laid up in honey-combs, to be the food of Christ.

Let us seek Christ, let us call Him to us, for He is all in all to us. Is any soul diseased with sins of the body ; is any soul cramped as it were with an iron

^q Cant. vi. 11.

^r Num. xvii. 18.

^s Cant. v. 1.

band of worldly desire ; is any yet imperfect though pressing forward with earnest meditation ; is any perfect in manifold graces ; let all come to Him, for all are in His power and Christ is all things to us. Art thou wounded and wouldst be healed, He is the physician^t ; dost thou burn with fever, He is the refreshing fountain^u ; art thou pressed down with iniquity, He is righteousness^x ; needest thou help, He is the power of God^y ; fearest thou death, He is life^z ; desirest thou Heaven, He is the way^a ; fliest thou darkness, He is light^b ; seekest thou food, He is the bread that came down from Heaven^c. *O taste, then, and see how gracious the Lord is : blessed is the man that trusteth in Him^d.*

The woman that was plagued with an issue of blood trusted in Him and immediately was healed, for she came to Him in faith. Do thou, too, daughter of the Church, come with faith, and touch though but the border of His garment. The torrent of worldly pleasures, that overfloweth like a flood, shall be stanch'd and dried up by the heat of the Sun of Righteousness, the health-giving Word ; only approach in faith like her ; take hold, with like devotion, of the very fringe of His heavenly words ; throw thyself trembling at the feet of thy Lord ; and where are His feet, but where His Body is ? O faith richer than all treasures ! O faith mightier than all bodily strength !

^t St. Matt. ix. 12.

^y 1 Cor. i. 24.

^b St. John i. 9.

^u Zech. xiii. 1.

^z St. John xi. 25.

^c St. John vi. 35.

^x 1 Cor. i. 30.

^a St. John xiv. 6.

^d Psalm xxxiv. 8.

more health-bringing than all physicians! She came near, she felt His power, she obtained her cure; even as when the eye is brought to the light, it is enlightened before it sees, and the operation of the light anticipates the vision. A disease inveterate, incurable, that had baffled every invention of art, that had drained all her resources, is cured by merely touching the border of a garment!

She was ashamed of being seen to approach Him; imitate, O virgin, her shamefacedness; she was confident in her faith, take pattern by her devotion. Great, truly, was her grace; she desired to conceal herself, yet desired not to conceal her fault, for she seemed to have done presumptuously. Neither do thou conceal thy faults, which He already knoweth, but confess them. Be not ashamed of doing what prophets have ere now done, and not been ashamed. These are the words of Jeremiah; *Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed*, words which express her meaning when she touched the fringe, as though she said, *Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed: Save me and I shall be saved, for Thou art my praise*^e; and none is really healed unless Thou heal her.

There may be some who will say to thee as was said to Jeremiah (for often are the faithful thus tempted), *Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now*^f; yea, to the Lord Himself was said, *Let Him now come down from the cross and we will believe Him*;

^e Jer. xvii. 14.

^f Jer. xvii. 15.

He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him^g. If any in mockery speak thus to thee, and try to entrap thee in vain words, see that after thy Master's example thou answer him not. Let thy converse be only with Christ; if thou speak to them, they will not believe, and if thou ask them, they will not answer thee^h; say to the Word, *As for me, I have not fainted in following after Thee; Lord, Thou knowest*ⁱ. Thus spake the woman with the bloody issue, and it was staunch'd. Though worn out by her long seeking, though full of sickness, still her words were, *Lord, I have not fainted in following after Thee*; nor shall any faint, who, like her, sincerely follow Christ, for He calls the faint and heavy-laden to find rest in following Him^k. Let us too follow Him and we shall not faint; the promise to Jacob shall be ours, *he shall be in rest and quiet*, as well as the promise in Isaiah, *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint*^l.

Christ asked who touched Him, and the woman seems to say, "Lord, why askest Thou, for Thou knowest; the words that pass from my lips are all before Thee, wherefore I am not ashamed to confess my sins unto Thee. *Let them be confounded that persecute me, but let not me be confounded*^m." In like manner blessed Peter was not ashamed to say,

^g St. Matt. xxvii. 42, 43.

^k Matt. xi. 28.

^h St. Luke xxii. 67, 68.

^l Isaiah xl. 31.

ⁱ Jer. xvii. 16.

^m Jer. xvii. 18.

*Depart from me, for I man a sinful man, O Lord*ⁿ, for he knew that the Lord could read his thoughts. St. Peter in whom the Church and the authority of her discipline was to be established, felt by his deep wisdom and foresaw, that nothing could be more profitable for him than that he should not be exalted above measure at the great miracle with which he had been favoured ; therefore he says, *Depart from me*, praying, not that Christ should abandon him, but that He should save him from arrogance. And so, St. Paul also glories in the thorn in his flesh, given to him lest he should be exalted above measure. Arrogance is an alluring temptation which even St. Paul dreads, a danger against which even he is specially protected (even he, I say, for few things could make him arrogant, whose danger arose from *the abundance of the revelations*) ; and his rejoicing is that of the perfect warrior of Christ, who gladly purchases his soul's health at the expense of a body wounded by a *thorn in the flesh*.

CHAP. XVII.

As the Virgin must shun arrogance, so must she still rise above the world in holiness.

BEWARE, Christian maid, of arrogance ; if thou be conscious that Divine grace abounds and overflows in thee, still measure thy virtue by the standard of per-

ⁿ St. Luke v. 8.

fection, give thanks to God and reflect on the infirmities of thy body; so, like a ship laden with ballast, thou shalt not be at the mercy of the wind of arrogance, amid the threatening waves of this world. The prudent bee is said to poise itself with little stones as a security for its light wings against the uncertain gusts of wind,

And as when empty barks on billows float,
 With sandy ballast sailors trim the boat,
 So bees bear gravel stones, whose poisoning weight
 Steers through the whistling winds their steady flight °.

St. Paul and St. Barnabas at Lystra rent their clothes when the people honoured them as gods. Do thou, O virgin, beware also, as thou hast the bee for thy example, lest any flattering gale of this world unduly exalt the flight of thy soul's wings. For the soul has wings, according as it is written, *who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows* P? It has its spiritual flights, whereby in the twinkling of an eye it traverses the whole world.

The contemplations of the wise are free and unbounded, and the higher they rise heavenwards, the less are they clogged by earthly hindrances; and the soul, cleaving to God and reflecting in itself the Divine image (with the passions, its fiery coursers, quieted and calm), is borne aloft by the motion of its spiritual wings into the pure ether and looks down upon the world. Intent on everlasting graces, it

° Virgil's Georg. iv. Dryden.

P Isaiah lx. 8.

escapes the world and rises far above it. Such a grace is righteousness, and righteousness is above the world, love is above the world, goodness is above the world, wisdom is above the world; yea, though it be in the world, yet is it above the world. Righteousness was above the world when Satan offered all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. He was above the world, who would touch nothing that it possessed, even as He said, *The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me*^q. Learn ye too, like your virgin Master, though in the world to be above it; and though ye bear about with you a body, let your soul within you wing its flight heavenwards. He that bears God in his body is above the world.

We cannot indeed be like God and holy as He is; let us imitate the Apostles, whom the world hated because they were not of the world. Imitate them, be thou a follower of them. Thou thinkest it hard to rise by human virtue above the world; and it is even so. The holy Apostles won not this grace by being equal with Christ, but by following Him as His disciples; be thou too, Christian virgin, Christ's disciple and follow Him; then does He pray for thee as He prayed for them. *Neither pray I, saith our blessed Lord, for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word, that they all may be one*^r. The Lord would have us all one, that we may all be above the world, one in chastity,

^q St. John xiv. 30.

^r St. John xvii. 20.

one in will, one in goodness, one in grace; for by these gifts the wings of the soul are exercised and strengthened. Let us not therefore be idle, but let us rise from earthly things; our wings will gather strength by exercise. Whatever our soul delights in, will aid our flight, so that if it always follow after God, and long to dwell in the house of the Lord and feed on joy in Him, and to be nourished by the miracles of virtue which His grace worketh, then will it cast out envy which finds no entrance into the angelic choir, then will it banish all bodily lusts which may not defile the temple of God; which temple since we are, let us renounce all worldly cares.

CHAP. XVIII.

The four Virtues which make harmony in the Virgin's soul.

THINK not that heathen philosophy and poetry supply us with the images which we have referred to the soul, a *chariot*, *wings* and *horses*: they rather have derived their images from us, and we use our own resources, the language of inspired prophécy. Thus it is written by holy Ezekiel, *The hand of the Lord was upon me, and I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber out of the midst of the fire; also out of the midst thereof came the*

likeness of four living creatures. Consider the description of these four living creatures; *as for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle*^s.

Here too (we have been taught) the soul of man is described. The four living creatures are its fourfold affections, not those untrained passions figured by the four horses in course of discipline and subjugation^t, but the affections of the matured and perfect soul. The soul in the former state is under probation, with Heaven before it as its reward; in the latter it is in Heaven with the Word of God. The four living creatures, which are also appropriate symbols of the books of the Holy Gospels, are here emblems of the purified affections. These affections (as the wise among the Greeks even have defined) are four. 1. Wisdom or Reason exercising its natural authority, wherewith man was endued at his creation; 2. Holy Resentment at the sense of wrong, like that wherewith the lion resists aggression; Christian daring and contempt of death; 3. Desire of what is good (imaged in the calf), which by due discipline grows into Temperance, careless of bodily pleasures, absorbed in the contemplation of heavenly mysteries, rejoicing in the bond of sacred charity; 4. The power of discerning right from wrong, Justice with its eagle eye, which, raised on its high tribunal, tries and

^s Ezek. i. 1—10.

^t See Ch. xv.

searches all things, unselfish, careful of others' right, the bond of social union. Well does the eagle figure justice ; soaring above earth, intent in its sublime elevation on the celestial mystery, it wins for its meed the glory of the Resurrection ; and so it is written, *He maketh thee young and lusty as an eagle*^u.

Hence it is plain that the holy Psalmist also describes the soul as borne up by spiritual wings ; and not in this place only, but again he saith, *Our soul is escaped even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler*^v, and elsewhere, *In the Lord put I my trust, how say ye then to my soul that she should flee as a bird unto the hill*^w? The soul, then, is not wholly earth-bound ; it has its wings, and its wings impart to it freedom ; wings, however, not of material substance, but whose feathers are holy deeds arranged in seemly order, like that wing of God, *under the shadow whereof shall be our refuge*. Specially indeed those outstretched Arms upon the Cross are our sheltering wings, but no less truly every act of holiness is a refreshing shadow of salvation, tempering the burning of a flaming world.

Let every Christian therefore stir up the grace of God ; forgetting what is behind, reaching forth unto those things which are before, let him press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. Let him forego the honours and contentions of this world, otherwise the fable of Icarus may be verified in him, a fable indeed, but truly teaching in

^u Psalm ciii. 5.

^v Psalm cxxiv. 6.

^w Psalm xi. 1.

poetic imagery that they alone, who are ripe in wisdom, can safely fly through this world's atmosphere, while the undisciplined youth, too adventurous and indulgent to his passions, loses the firm compact of his wings by neglect of holy deeds, and forgetful of the maxims of wisdom falls back to earth and perishes with more fearful destruction than if he had never known the way of truth.

And as our flight is perilous, so in the chariot-race of this life, the passions, our restive coursers, threaten us with danger. If, however, they be duly balanced, the prophet shall again see in us *one wheel upon the earth, by the living creatures*^x; yea, Ezekiel shall see it, for he is still alive, he sees, he is mighty, and shall live in strength for ever; he shall see upon the earth *a wheel in the middle of a wheel, gliding without obstacle*^y. The *wheel upon the earth by the living creatures* is in its spiritual meaning the life of the body when brought into harmony with the soul, and fashioned in uniform obedience after the evangelic precepts; the *wheel in the middle* of this outer wheel is an inner life, within the former, even as we see that the life of saints is not at variance with itself, the former part thereof agreeing with the later; and again, the life which they shall live for ever in Heaven being even now begun and involved in their bodily life.

When this harmony is brought to pass, then shall the echo of the Divine voice be heard, then *above the*

^x Ezek. i. 15.

^y Ezek. i. 16.

firmament shall appear the likeness of a throne as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and upon the likeness of the throne the likeness as the appearance of a Man above upon it^z! This Man is the Word; *the Word was made flesh*^a; and He is the charioteer who subdues our passions; He is our Ruler, either (according to our several conditions and deserts), as a charioteer, as a teacher on the mount, or as a pilot. But He steers no ship in which there are not Apostles to sail, or St. Peter to fish; it is no common ship which is *launched out into the deep*^b; the ship wherein Christ sits and teaches the people is the Church, which moves in safety through the world, borne onwards by the outstretched sail of the Cross of Christ, filled by the gale of the Holy Spirit.

In this ship St. Peter, now with hook and now with net, is bid to fish. O wondrous mystery! he, the spiritual fisherman is bid to cast the hook of holy doctrine into the sea of this world, that he may take out thence the first martyr Stephen, bearing within him the *tribute* of Christ; for CHRIST'S MARTYR IS THE CHURCH'S TREASURE. He was the first lifted from the sea to Heaven, caught by Peter to be a minister of the Altar; caught, not in a net, but by the hook, that alone in his own blood he might be taken up to Heaven. In his mouth was the tribute, when in his confession he spake of Christ; for what other treasure can be in us but the WORD of God? Whoso

^z Ezek. i. 26.^a St. John i. 14.^b St. Luke v. 4.

is more perfect is God's fisherman, both with hook and net; the one surrounds, the other stings; by one multitudes are encircled, by the other man by man is chosen. Would to God that I might be allowed to swallow that spiritual hook, which by a rapid sting and slight wound would bring me to salvation!

CHAP. XIX.

The Virgin must in the Communion of St. Peter and the Church, be ready to give up all for Christ.

ENTER ye, therefore, virgins, the Apostles' nets, which are let down not by man's authority, but at the voice of God; the net of spiritual wisdom and doctrine is the Kingdom of Heaven, which, in our Lord's own words, *is like unto a net cast into the sea*^c. To-day, on this holy festival, the day of St. Peter and St. Paul, ye have heard the Lord's words to Simon, *Launch out into the deep, and let down the nets for a draught*^d. Before our Lord thus spake, St. Peter was fishing in the sea indeed, but in the shallows, and here Holy Scripture finds no depth; where then is the deep?

First, in the heart of man; *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water*^e, and here there are no shallows. *Launch out into the deep*, that is, attempt the heart of man with the oars of argument and faith.

^c St. Matt. xiii. 47.

^d St. Luke v. 4.

^e Prov. xx. 5.

Thus does our Blessed Lord in this place call St. Peter to the Church by a parable, even as in St. Matthew, in plain words, He saith, *Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men*^f. Secondly, in the Gospel; for this is another spiritual interpretation. The synagogue was in the shallows, there was no deep water in Judea; so were the Samaritans, and the hidden meaning of the Samaritan woman's question, *the well is deep, from whence then hast Thou that living water to give me?* implies that they too were unable to launch out into the deep, even as the Jews were, whose faith they held. *Launch out into the deep*; the *deep* is Christ, as is written of the Baptist in the Song of Zechariah, *Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest*, and height and depth are the same thing^g. Christ is the *deep*, in whom is the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God: He is depth and height; He exalteth and is the Keeper of him whom He exalts.

Where Christ is, there are the deep waters, there is faith that feareth the Lord; *the waters saw Thee, O God, the waters saw Thee, and were afraid*^h. As for the Jews, with them was no deep water, for it is written, *This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their "heart" is far from Me*ⁱ. Christ must dwell in the heart, as is mystically implied in His own words, *As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so must the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the "heart" of the earth*^k.

^f St. Matt. iv. 19.^g St. Luke i. 76.^h Psalm lxxvii. 16.ⁱ St. Matt. xv. 8.^k St. Matt. xii. 40.

If we continue the interpretation of the Holy Gospel, the explanation just given will appear still more plainly. St. Peter answers our Lord, *Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing; nevertheless, at Thy word, I will let down the net.* It was night with Peter before he saw Christ. The day had not yet risen on him; the true light had not yet shone on him. The Synagogue is night, the Church is day; as St. Paul says, *The night is far spent, the day is at hand.* Blessed is that light which hath driven away the darkness of faithlessness and brought in the day of faith. By it Peter was made day, by it Paul was made day; and lo! on the anniversary of their martyrdom, their true birth-day, the voice of the Holy Spirit utters the words, *One day telleth another*¹, that is, out of the treasure of their heart they preach the faith of Christ; and a blessed day is each, for each hath shed the true light forth on us.

Peradventure the colloquy between our Lord and Peter, which the Holy Gospel relates, is held in Heaven, even to-day^m, with reference to us. Still daily St. Peter is the fisherman; still daily the Lord saith to him, *Launch out into the deep.* I seem to myself to hear the Apostles saying, *Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.* O how few assemble at the Vigils and watch by night! St. Peter *toils* in us, when our devotion is a toil to us; so, too,

¹ The 19th Psalm is still the first Psalm in the first Nocturn of the *Commune Apostolorum.*

^m St. Ambrose is referring to the Festival, June 29.

does holy Paul, whose words ye have heard to-day, *Who is weak and I am not weak?* O let not the blessed Apostles *toil* through your lack of devotion. Behold, they say, *we have toiled all the night and have taken nothing.* Are there any among the rich who fast in the sacred vigils? If not, let them hear St. Peter's words, *Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear, forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot*ⁿ. Gold and silver redeemed you not, but the trial of your faith, which is much more precious than gold that perisheth. It is the study of a faithful slave to repay his master the price for which he was bought. Thy price, virgin, was not gold, it was not silver; Christ bought thee not with treasure. Be ready with the price; thou ever owest it, though it be not exacted of thee: He paid His blood for thee, thou owest Him thine; He paid it for thee, repay it for thyself. We were bound by our sins to a cruel creditor, we had contracted the hand-writing of guilt, we had incurred the penalty of blood; the Lord Jesus came and offered His own for us; thou owest thine, yet canst not pay it. As a faithful slave thou art bound to repay thy Master the price He has paid for thee; thou canst not do it in kind, yet this do, see that thou be not unworthy of

ⁿ St. Peter i. 17—19.

the price. Bear thyself, Christian maid, worthy of thy redemption, lest Christ, who hath cleansed thee, who hath redeemed thee, come, and finding thee in thy sins, say, *What profit is there in My blood*^o? what good have I done thee by *going down into the pit*? For thither, though His flesh saw no corruption, He descended; He descended into hell, into the place of corruption, though corruption touched not Him who is incorruptible.

CHAP. XX.

An earnest desire that God's Priests, the successors of St. Peter, may gather many Virgins into the Church's fold.

LET us return to the words of our Blessed Lord, and pray ye for God's Priest, that to him too may be said, *Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a draught*. Who can be God's fisherman, amid the storms and tempests of the world, without God's help? When He so wills, He gives the word, the nets are let down and a multitude is taken, so great that another ship too is filled; yea, many Churches are filled with the pure people of God. And when the faithful multiply, God sends more labourers, as St. Peter beckoned to his partners, *that were in the other ship, that they should come and help them*; and when Thou multipliest Thy labourers, O Lord, do Thou in-

^o Psalm xxx. 9.

crease their draught of fishes! Their nets are not their own, they are the Apostles'. May bands of holy virgins be gathered in their folds, the folds of apostolic instructions! May holy Peter quicken you, O virgins; he interceded for a widow, far more will he for a virgin; moved by the widows' tears he raised to life Dorcas who sustained them. May holy Paul quicken you, who bids honour to be paid to you; *it is good*, he saith, *to abide even as I*. He would win you by the honour, he teaches by his authority, he invites you by his example. May he quicken you, who left all and followed Christ! so did blessed Peter, so did St. John.

How highly advanced was that poor fisherman! he was seeking a livelihood on the sea and he found the Life of all; he quitted his boat and found God; he left his thole and found the Word; he loosened his lines and bound fast his faith; he folded up his nets and he caught men; he despised the sea and earned Heaven. While he is tossed on the troubled sea, he founded on a rock men's wavering minds, which till then could find no rest. Let us dwell on his humble craft, that we may the more admire his virtue; was he an ignoble servant of men, his office as Evangelist was more exalted; was he pinched by poverty, he was the richer in virtue; was he lowly among men, he was highly esteemed in faith. Is a fisher's good faith mistrusted, he is the more believed, for he spoke not his own words but God's. Was his earthly condition debased, his lack of this world's wisdom was

more than compensated by his spiritual wisdom. He who has not the law, but does by nature the things contained in the law, is himself a law to himself; he who was unlearned in the law and yet spake above it as Peter did, received his words from Him by whom the law itself was given.

O great and quickly-earned dignity! The poor fishermen bear comparison with Moses the giver, and Elias the executor, of the law. The virtues of Moses and St. Peter were different, but the grace of God was great in both; to one the knowledge of creation was revealed; the other was great in his ignorance of the world. Moses by spiritual wisdom rose above all earthly things and the height of this world's wisdom, even to Heaven: and the soul of this poor fisher, undarkened by clouds, and unlimited by time, enters the mysteries of the Divine nature; soaring beyond created matter he saw the Word with God and saw that the Word was God: the veil of flesh weakened not his faith, he acknowledged the Son of God in the form of man, by which mystery the humanity assumed is admitted to the prerogatives of the Godhead, which assumed it. Moses, indeed, in saying, *And God said—and God made*, in the history of the creation, implied the utterance of the Father, and the operation of the Son, but the meaning was sealed and he alone knew it, and therefore after the Law was given the people went astray; but now by the Gospel, the truth is at length revealed and the Church believes.

On Holy Virginity.

[May those who now as blessed Peter did, labour as God's fishermen, let down at the Divine Word their nets for a draught, and may the net of holy Church be filled with devout and earnest souls ; and again may not a few be found, ardent aspirants after Christian perfection, resolved, in the renunciation of all that may wean them from their heavenly Spouse, to consecrate themselves to His undivided service in Holy Virginity.]

Glory be to God.



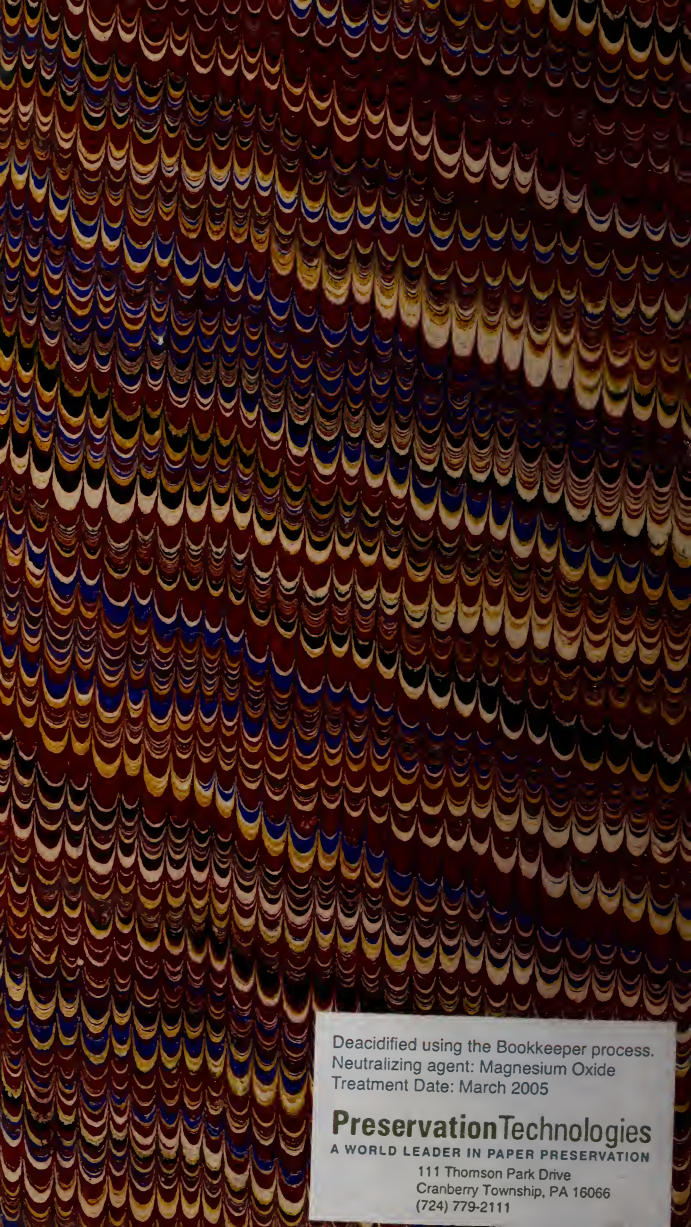
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